Otis Adelbert Kline in this issue

Weird Tales

NOV. 1931

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVIII NUMBER 4

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for November, 1931

Cover Design ---------- C. C. Senf

Illustrating a scene in "Placide's Wife"

The Eyrie ---------- 436

A chat with the readers

Placide's Wife ---------- Kirk Mashburn 440

A shuddery story of the Louisiana Cajuns, of corpses that screamed in their graves, and a woman who would not stay dead

The Second-Hand Limousine ---------- Harold Markham 454

A most peculiar story of a limousine that was destined to meet with a tragic accident

On Hallows' E'en ---------- Alfred I. Tooke 463

Verse; decoration by C. C. Senf

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

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[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

Subterranea ---------- W. Elwyn Backus 464

A remarkable novelette concerning a strange country lying several miles beneath the pryamids of Egypt

The Tale of Satampra Zeiros ---------- Clark Ashton Smith 491

Concerning the weird and most unpleasant fate that befell two marauders who dared disturb ancient gods

The Black Stone ---------- Robert E. Howard 500

What happened when a man discovered a horrible creature from the Elder World that made its home in Hungary

The Ghost That Never Died ---------- Elizabeth Sheldon 512

A most unusual story concerning a man and woman who were killed by the ghost of a living person

The Empty House ---------- Cristel Hastings 521

Verse

Tam, Son of the Tiger (Part 5) ---------- Otis Adelbert Kline 522

This breath-taking serial of Asian gods and weird creatures discloses some hair-raising adventures

Jungle Feud ---------- Alice I'Anson 541

Verse

Doom Around the Corner ---------- Wilfred Branch Talman 542

A charming, whimsical story of a man who never outgrew his belief in fairies and of the fate he met

Return ---------- Leona May Ames 545

Verse

The Boiling Photograph ---------- Paul Ernst 546

A strange story of Northern Africa and the astral double of an American —a tale of King Tut's tomb

Weird Story Reprint:

The Wolf-Leader (Part 4) ---------- Alexandre Dumas 552

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READERS of WEIRD TALES again are reminded of the thrills that soon will be theirs when Seabury Quinn's serial, *The Devil's Bride,* brings Jules de Grandin to them. The eccentric little French detective-physician, with his mastery over the forces of evil that lurk in black magic, appears to better advantage in the novel than in short stories. His field is widened and his problems are multiplied. There are scenes in *The Devil's Bride* that will linger in the memory of those who read Mr. Quinn's novel for the rest of their lives.

And from the home land of Jules de Grandin comes another great serial by a French writer whose fame was extended to the United States by *The Phantom of the Opera*—Gaston Leroux. Monsieur Leroux offers for the enjoyment of WEIRD TALES readers a novel that, without exaggeration, may be said to excel *The Phantom of the Opera.* It is called *The Haunted Chair,* and for sheer diabolic plot construction this story takes first rank among the world's weird narratives.

Robert E. Howard's story, *The Footfalls Within,* had a margin of one vote over Seabury Quinn's tale, *Satan's Stepson,* in the September issue. *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* was not far behind, however, as Otis Adelbert Kline's remarkable serial was a very close third—and judging from what the politicians call "scattering returns" this absorbing tale of the tiger-man will retain its popularity to the final sentence of the last installment.

"I have just concluded reading your September issue of WEIRD TALES and am very well satisfied with it," writes Lester Philip Lieber, of Shreveport, Louisiana. "I see that one remarkable point about this magazine is the fact that you do not cater to any one type of story, but give us many different ones. By this I mean that you do not, for example, overdo the amount of ghost stories; you vary them with interplanetary or scientific stories. However, I really do believe that you should have more interstellar and time-traveling stories. It seems to me that the best story in your September issue is *Tam, Son of the Tiger.*"

But what about this point? Not about *Tam,* of course, but about the weird-scientific tales. Justin Crunican, of Forest Grove, Oregon, raises a voice to the contrary. "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for the last four years," he writes. "It is the only magazine that I really care for, but I really believe if you would publish fewer space stories it would be more in keeping with the general character of the magazine. Let WEIRD TALES stick to the bizarre and supernatural."

(Please turn to page 570)

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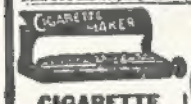

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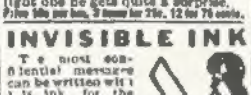

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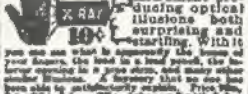

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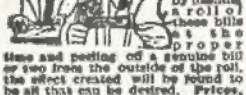

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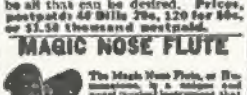

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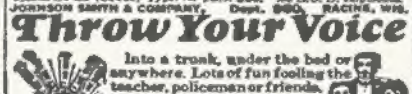

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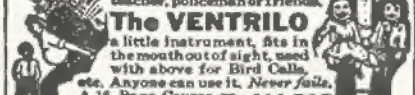

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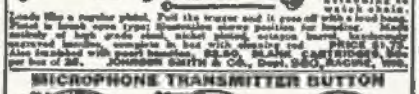

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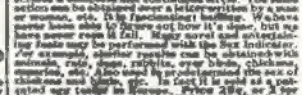

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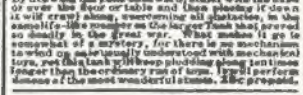

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PLACIDE'S WIFE

By KIRK MASHBURN

A shuddery story of Louisiana Cajuns, of corpses that screamed in their graves, and a woman who would not stay dead

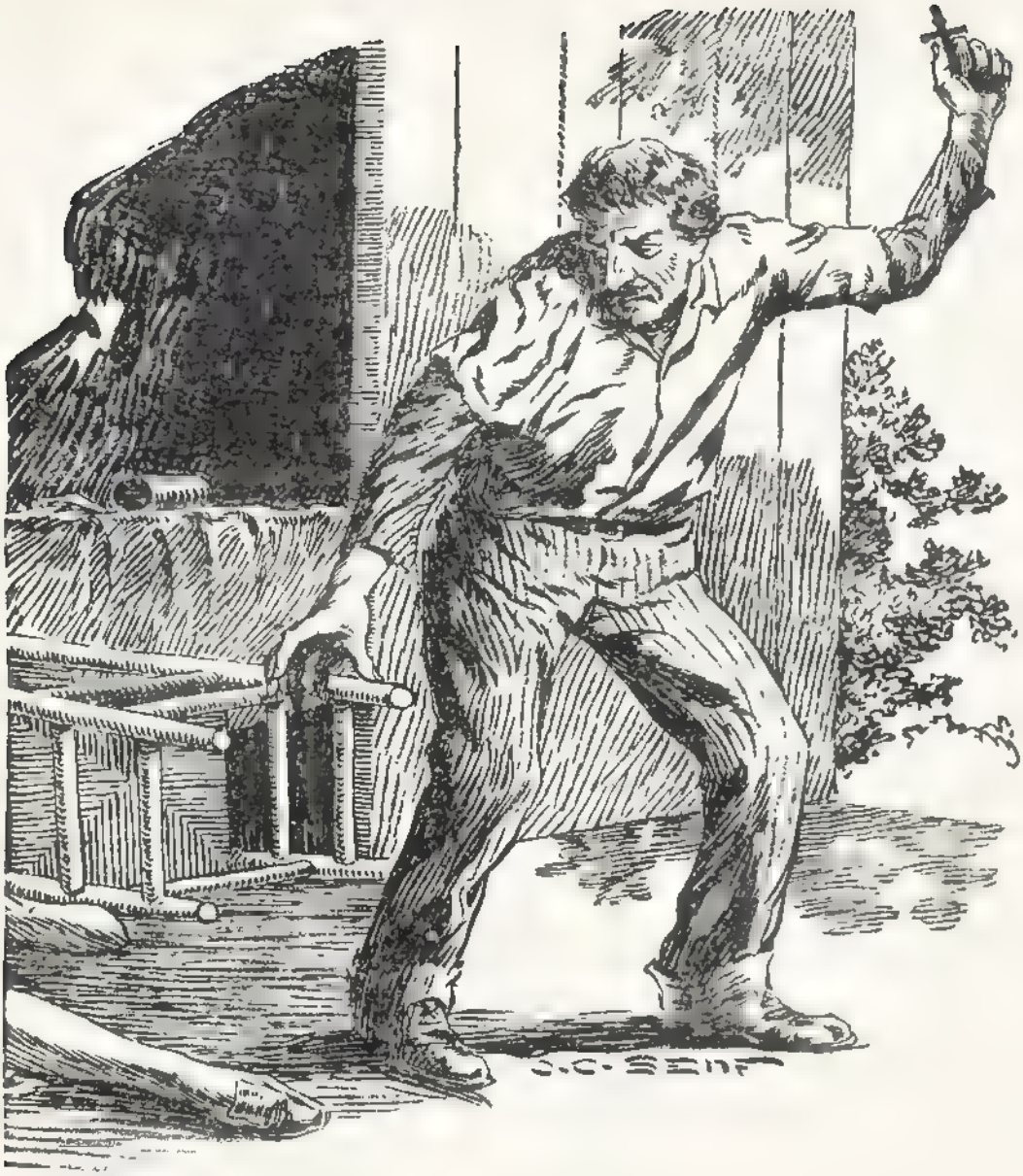
"Then, while she lay stunned on the floor, Placide flung the desecrated crucifix."

FROM the depths of the dank, moss-festooned woods, a long-drawn howl quavered upward to a cloaked and sullen moon. There was a sinister, unearthly quality about the ululation that set it apart from the orthodox lament of any random, mournful hound.

It startled us, gathered there in the temporary shack that served the road-building crew for office and commissary combined. The dull buzz of conversation stilled for a long minute. I saw more than one stolid Cajun farmer — road-builder, *pro tem*—furtively sign the cross; chairs and packing-boxes croaked under the sudden uneasy shifting of their burdens.

"Placide's wife——" I heard some one's perturbed mutter.

It was old Landry, gnarled and seamed



and squat of body, ordinarily taciturn to the point of sourness. A half-dozen pairs of eyes flashed distrustfully in my direction, then settled in common focus upon the speaker. The rebuke and its intimation were plain: I was a State Highway Department engineer, an alien in their midst; and whatever old Landry had meant, it was one of those many things, ranging from the utterly trivial to the supremely tragic, of which no discussion is had with strangers. If one be a French-descended "Cajun" of the southwestern Louisiana parishes, suspicious of all unproved folk, one does not speak haphazardly concerning obscure local matters.

Landry withdrew even more deeply into his shell of taciturnity; there was an ineffectual attempt or two to resume talk, but a damper seemed to have been put upon any further desire for conversation. In twos and threes, but never singly, the

members of the group drifted away to their bunks in close succession. I was left alone with Delacroix, the young commissary clerk and timekeeper for the road gang.

"What was there about what the old man said, to sour the balance of them so thoroughly?" My curiosity prompted the question.

My companion hesitated about replying. He was of the locality, and even though of a finer breed than the teamsters and laborers of the crew, he possessed, in less degree, some of their instinctive clannishness. Still, when one is working one's way through the engineering school of the State University, there is evidence therein of qualities superior to the inhibitions of simplicity. Delacroix shrugged his shoulders.

"There is a story behind it," he admitted.

"Tell it," I urged. It was still too early for bed.

Once more, before he could comply, that weird latration from the forest set the night a-quiver. We listened in silence until it ended.

"So!" observed Delacroix.

Then he told me of one, Placide, and of Placide's wife; and this is the substance of his story:

PLACIDE DUBOIN [said Delacroix] spent thirty of his nearly fifty years of life peacefully upon one patch of bayou land. His paunch was kept satisfactorily heavy with beans, and with rice which he grew more by the kindness of heaven than any great exertion of his own. Sometimes he wheezed down the bayou in an ancient oyster-boat, with the running of which the indulgence of Providence may also have had a hand, judging by the neglected condition of its decrepit engine.

In the bay, Placide caught shrimps; in the winter, he sporadically trapped muskrats and shot ducks. Always, he had enough black perique for his pipe, and a little wine to wash down his food. Rarely, he would go to town and get very drunk. For a man with no wants beyond his creature comforts, and a masterless, indolent existence, it was a good life.

Then the time came when oil was found in the neighborhood of Placide's quarter-section, and he sold the ground that he had homesteaded thirty years before, for more money than Placide had any business with. Some people said he got ten thousand dollars; the highest estimate placed the amount at five times as much. At any rate, it was enough to be Placide's undoing.

He moved to town. Now, Labranch is a village to you or even to me, a sleepy little town of some three thousand souls; but, to this old one, it was a veritable city. Not that it made any difference: Placide could loaf as well as, or even better, in the town than on the bayou, and he held on to his money with tight fingers.

Placide loafed too well! Not content with a full belly and freedom, with no more burden upon his shoulders than holding fast to the wealth with which accident had endowed him, he had so much time on his hands that he filled it in by marrying a woman out of a visiting carnival troupe. Having lived womanless for nearly fifty years, this stupid one, this great clod, must marry a gipsy-looking wench from a street fair. A snake-charmer! Eh!

True, she was young, and more than good to look at (so they say), with her olive skin and black hair, and dark, inviting eyes that turned upward a little at the corners. Nita, her name was; and though the women of Labranch snubbed her for the memory of her snakes, and for marrying old lazy Placide for his money—it *had* to be his money!—the men were

friendly enough, behind their women's backs. Too friendly!

Placide, seeing his wife's flirtations, stolidly packed her off to another shack on another bayou where oil had not as yet been found, and where there were fewer men for her to dally with, beating her methodically when she rebelled. He had a certain respect for his own rights, Placide.

So Nita ate red beans and rice, and was lucky to have a pair of shoes. . . . You have heard it said, that the way to keep a woman virtuous is to keep her barefooted? Well! And all the time, Placide's money rotted wherever it was buried in the ground. (No banks for that one!)

And Nita, having sold herself to Placide and been cheated of her purchase price, soured inside herself, hating Placide more with each dull day. Her only companion was a great black cat that had come with her to Labranch, along with the snakes; only, one supposes that Placide had objected to the snakes, if they did not belong to the carnival, anyway.

This cat of Nita's had yellow eyes, out of which it glared hate at all the world except its mistress. The cat hated Placide more even than Nita did: it would stare at him for minutes on end, its eyes smoldering; or, sometimes, it would arch its back and yowl at him like a fiend.

The cat would spit, also, at Henry Lebaudy and the few others who sometimes hunted or fished with Placide. It scratched Lebaudy, for no reason whatever; so Lebaudy, not liking this—and not liking cats at all, and this one even less—gabbled at Placide to kill the *sale bête noir*.

Placide—he likes the idea, him! So he shoots the cat. That is, Lebaudy swears to this day that he did—shot it at least a dozen times, loading and reloading his shotgun. Placide was a crack shot, you comprehend, and grew angrier and more determined with each belch of his gun. He did not like to miss, especially this cat.

Finally, Placide begins to be afraid he is *not missing*—although the buckshot does not kill the beast, nor even seem to hurt it. Placide is very superstitious Probably his hand trembles, and he tells Lebaudy:

"*Sale bête noir,* yeh!—*du Diable!*" Dirty black beast, yes—of the Devil!

They look at each other—one pictures them. They look back at the cat. But the cat is gone, disappeared. Afterward, Lebaudy admits, they let it alone, and signed the cross whenever it came near—which, Henry says, the cat did not like, and would go howling and spitting away. Well!

So only Nita loved the cat, and the cat loved Nita: both hated Placide. As for him, this dumb Placide, he grew more sullen and suspicious than ever, without knowing exactly why, but went about his dull affairs as usual.

Sometimes he still rattled down to the bay to catch shrimps. That meant a day and part of the night away from home, even if the engine in his boat gave no trouble—which was not always, nor even often. On one such day, a vagabond gipsy peddler drove his wagon along the bayou, and stopped eventually at Placide's house.

This peddler was a bright-eyed ruffian, with dark hair falling over his forehead; not unhandsome, in a sly, evil way. Pierre Abadie, who passed Placide's shanty twice during the day, and stopped once to ask for matches to light his pipe, said that Nita and the peddler spoke together in a strange, outlandish tongue, neither French nor English. The peddler's horse was unharnessed, and grazed about the place, all through that day. Placide heard of it, and he beat Nita. Naturally!

The peddler set up a tent, outside Labranch, and mended pots and pans, and without doubt engaged in other less open practises. He seemed unconcerned, once, when Placide came by and stopped a moment in front of the tent, saying nothing, but glowering sullenly. So, after a bit, Placide went on to the shack where yellow Marie sold vile bootleg whisky, and hatched viler schemes in her festering old brain.

This Marie—if she had any other name, none knew, nor cared—was a quadroon woman who had lived in a tumbledown hovel on the fringe of town for as long as most people remembered. Some of the oldest *habitants* said she had once been a wildly beautiful creature, much as a sleek, cruel, yellow tigress is beautiful; but now she was a wrinkled old hag, a dispenser of vicious liquor, a procuress when chance offered—and, so the blacks and the ignorant whites whispered, a witch. The people of Labranch would have liked to have packed her off elsewhere, but there she was, and there she stayed.

Eh? Oh! The sheriff, among others, was one of those old men who had memories of Marie's golden days. . . . You comprehend! Then, too, this Marie was clever, discreet, you understand. Nobody knew anything against her except rumors —nobody, that is, who cared to tell. So Marie stayed on.

The old hag had no love for Placide, and he had less for her. But the one had liquor that was as cheap as it was powerful, and the other had a thirst which a perpetual regard for economy required him to quench with as little expense as might be.

Now, Placide ordinarily drank almost not at all, except reasonably of wine with his supper; but on this day, he had quarreled again with Nita, and beat her without afterward feeling the proper satisfaction. He felt that even when he knocked her half senseless, she was still the stronger of the two. His sullen spirits needed further outlet.

You have noticed, have you not, how a very little thing can set in train a whole series of events? Well! A little thing it was that Placide, the tight-fisted, should unreasonably insist upon old Marie taking drink for drink with him of her corrosive whisky. Even though Placide paid for it, it was almost as unreasonable for Marie to accept, knowing as she did the truth about what she dispensed. That is what greed for money will do: I have many times remarked that it is not a good thing.

So Placide and Marie drank together; and, after a while, Placide's sullen tongue loosened enough to where he growled of his wife to the yellow woman. That was not a good thing, either. . . . But, then, what to expect, it being that Placide?

Marie, being a she-devil sober, and a more malicious she-devil in liquor, twitted him about the peddler and his suspicions of Nita, even in the hearing of the other customers who sought her aid in poisoning themselves.

"Why she doan' leave yo', dat's all Ah doan' onnerstan'," gibed the hag, in Cajun-English like Placide's own.

"Aho!" says Placide, speaking in the reasonably pure French of his fathers, "she hopes to find the money I have buried in the ground— and she's not going to find it, I can tell you that!"

Marie was all ears, now, and her eyes glittered like a spider's watching a fly. Money in the ground! She attempted to draw more from Placide, but her eagerness betrayed itself, and he shut up like one of those oysters, suspicious.

He had right to his suspicions, for he caught her, the very next day, prowling around the woods near his cabin on the bayou. She was peering carefully at the

ground, scratching and probing here and there with a pole she carried. Now, Placide had been dully angry because he thought the peddler wanted his woman, but this Marie was after his money—and that was something else, altogether! The peddler got glares and sullen maledictions, but Marie got the beating of her life. Almost, Placide killed her; and she was just able, after a long time, to drag herself back toward town as far as the peddler's tent.

The peddler helped her as well as he could, while the hag cursed Placide and all his works. After a while she quieted, and talked long and earnestly with the gipsy, who listened more attentively as her talk went on.

Doubtless, Marie knew, as do all those who have a hand in such matters, that curses and spells and *gris-gris* charms work much better when the victim knows about it. (Maybe they would not work at all, otherwise!) She knew that Placide was very superstitious. So she was careful that it came to Placide's ears that she was going to put a *conjur* on him, and that it would be better for him to dig up his money and leave the parish. Nita, of course, would tell the peddler, in case her man took the warning to heart. She would know when Placide dug up his money. . . . After which, you speculate on the ending for yourself.

A queer thing is that Marie must have believed in her own *gris-gris* charms, especially as the peddler doubled it with a dreadful spell of his own. Doubtless they both believed in it, and it may be that they were right. Eh! Only, it may also be that they meddled with much more dangerous things than they knew; Marie especially. What the peddler thought or knew, only he could have told. At any rate, they did more than threaten Placide with a spell. They went about it, seriously.

Now, much of this story has to be surmised, and the gaps filled in between the fragments of known fact, which are fewer than they might be. But these people around here tell the whole story, when they tell it at all, with the sureness that comes of believing what one wishes to believe. . . . Very well! That is the way I am telling it to you.

One thing is known: This peddler bought a crucifix at Jules Froissard's store in Labranch, which was afterward seen in Placide's cabin. Froissard remembered it by its general shape and design, and particularly because there was a little of the end broken off one arm of the cross. The peddler got it cheaply for that reason. The crucifix later seen in Placide's shanty had this same shortened arm, but it had been painted black and changed in other ways. For one thing, a file had been used to change the Savior's face beyond recognition, and—good old Father Soulin wept bitterly when they showed him the blasphemy of it—a pair of tiny horns had been soldered to the head. The gipsy tinner's work, that! (Well, he paid for it!)

There was a little red bag tied around the cross—that was Marie. Eh? Yes, certainly; it was full of queer charms to make a spell on Placide. *Gris-gris.*

Well, the peddler carried it to Placide's woman, and one supposes that they plotted much together. One believes that the peddler wanted Nita as much as he wanted Placide's money; and it may be that Nita desired the peddler, *then*. . . . Afterward. . . .

THE women put the impious crucifix under the bed—and that is where she made a mistake. Placide had heard of the plot to put a spell upon him, only that day, and he was both angry and afraid. He had gone to Marie's place, but he found her absent, and the dive closed—which may have been well for

Marie. At the peddler's tent, Placide found the gipsy sitting crosslegged on the ground, elaborately whetting an edge upon a most ferocious-looking butcher knife. So Placide, not unreasonably, left the peddler at peace until he went back and got his gun, or at least, until he could deal with him on even terms. In the meantime, he doubtless argued that he could go home and beat Nita.

On the way back to his cabin, Placide drank from a flask he carried. Meeting with Henry Lebaudy, he would have given Henry a drink, but the bottle was empty. So Henry must come to Placide's cabin, where there was a whole demijohn of good wine, waiting to be drunk. It was not far off, and they would get drunk together.

At the cabin, Placide reached under the bed for the demijohn, felt something else, and—brought out that crucifix!

Now, Placide was superstitious: not religious, you will comprehend, but superstitious. The mutilated crucifix was an awful and startling thing to him; but whether he would have understood that it was evilly designed toward himself, without that little red bag tied to it, I do not know. The *gris-gris* he understood quite well. He went mad.

Lebaudy says he seized Nita as one might take a ten-pound sack of flour, and flung her hard to the floor. He was a bull for strength, Placide.

Then, while she lay stunned on the floor, Placide flung the desecrated crucifix full at her smooth throat. The cross was flat and thin, and its ends were flattened and beat into a design something like a wedge-shaped clover leaf. With Placide's great strength behind it, it is no wonder that it tore deep into Nita's round throat, where it stood upright. It wabbled drunkenly, sickening Lebaudy, while Nita quivered and twitched for a few moments; then she was still. The blood welled slowly from the wound, impeded by the instrument that caused it.

Then that great black cat bounded out of a corner, leaping over the body of its mistress as if to attack Placide. The beast thought better of it, perhaps; at any rate it turned back to sit upon the woman's breast. Lebaudy says it sat there and howled like one of those fiends in hell, while its yellow eyes blazed red fire. Heu!

Then the monster crept upward to Nita's throat. It licked away the dark blood; after which it started yowling with more energy.

All this, you understand, in just a very few minutes; while that stupid Lebaudy stood there, one assumes, with his slack mouth hanging open wider even than usual.

Both men looked long at the body of the woman: that was all—just looked. Then Lebaudy began to look at Placide, too. Sideways, you know, like that. Placide, he began to worry. . . . Well! It was time for him to worry, one comprehends!

"*Now* what you going to do, eh, Placide?" Lebaudy wants to know.

"Well," says Placide, speaking French like Lebaudy, and slow and heavy like he always talks, "I'm going to put her in the ground and bury her." Then he turns round and looks hard at Lebaudy, who said, afterward, that there was a red light in Placide's eyes.

"You're going to help me bury her—*and you're going to keep quiet, all the rest of your life!* Ain't you, Henry?"

"Heh?" gulps Lebaudy.

"Heh?" Placide says, too; but he says it a different way, and the veins kind of swelled in his forehead. He moved a step closer to Lebaudy.

"Yeh!" agrees this Henry, swallowing hard; "I'm going to help you bury

her." (Henry Lebaudy is a little man, and he knows it!)

"And—you're—going—to—keep—quiet!" grits Placide. Another step closer!

"I'm going to keep quieter than that!" Lebaudy is trying to swallow his tongue by this time, one supposes.

So Placide got spades, and they carried his woman out into the bushes a way, off behind the shack, and dug a deep hole. The cat went along, too, and spit and howled, and tried to claw Placide's legs. It hopped back and forth across the hole, after they put Nita in it and were ready to shovel the dirt on top of her.

Try as he would and did, Placide couldn't kill it with his spade. . . . What? Why, because he couldn't hit it, certainly. It dodged, you understand. Lebaudy says it *faded* from under the tool—and then there it was again, quick as a flash, just out of reach. (Of course, Lebaudy is stupid; likewise, he does not always tell the truth! No, not even now that he is an old, old man, who should be thinking seriously of his sins. . . . However, I am telling you what he said, and his salvation is the priest's business—not mine!)

WELL, they buried Nita, and left the cat sitting on her grave. Afterward, Placide sent Lebaudy on his way, first giving him two great cupsfull of strong wine, and growling a few plain threats in his ear—both of which were to stiffen Henry's resolution. So Lebaudy went.

Placide, you see, was not really a murderer; only a poor oaf to whom the good God sent too much money, and the Devil a woman. If he had been a murderer, he would have tried to cover up his crime by killing Lebaudy, too: even this stupid Placide must have known that one hangs but once, regardless of how many times one kills. Probably he thought Lebaudy would keep quiet for a little while, at least, and give him time to get his money and escape.

But Lebaudy did not keep quiet—not very long. He didn't know how! And he was, also, afraid.

So Lebaudy went straight to the sheriff; and the sheriff, being an old man, sent his deputy, Sostan LeBleu—no, not the one you know; this was a cousin—who talked only less than Lebaudy. And thus LeBleu told others, and several volunteered to go to Placide's place with him; and one or two saddled their horses and came along without even volunteering.

They passed by the peddler's on the way, and paused long enough to wake him and tell him where they were going, and why. The peddler climbed on his old nag without bothering to saddle it, and came with them.

Now, it is some miles from Labranch to Placide's old cabin, but it is not a long ride for men on horseback. LeBleu and his posse were soon there, demanding entrance.

There was a light inside the cabin, when LeBleu hammered on the door. After a moment, the door opened. LeBleu had his pistol in his hand, and it was a good thing it didn't have a hair trigger, because the deputy was so surprized when that door opened, he dropped the gun.

It wasn't Placide who opened—it was Nita!

"Wal," she says (Nita couldn't speak French), "w'at yo' want?"

LeBleu, having come to arrest her murderer, now didn't really know what he wanted, any more than she did!

"Ain't Placide killed yo'?" he blurts out. Somebody laughed (which, you can understand, almost any one *would!*), and LeBleu says, embarrassed, "I mean, where is Placide?"

"Inside," Nita tells him. "Come on in."

Placide was lying in the bed. He looked dully at LeBleu and the others, who noticed, without thinking too much about it, that there were several nasty marks on his face . . . like the claw marks of a beast, for instance . . . or a woman. . . .

There was a bandage around Nita's throat, also. That much, at least, of Lebaudy's story was true — Placide had hurled something at her throat. Well, they would doubtless be thinking, after Nita got up, she scratched his face: nothing strange about that! A man and his wife could fight it they wanted to, could they not? Naturally!

"Too moch wine: 'e's dronk!" Nita snarls. " 'E got dronk wit' t'at Lebaudy, an' beat me." She shrugs her shoulders, which was to say: 'What is there of newness in *that?*

"Oho!" LeBleu says, as if comprehending much. "So Lebaudy was drunk! I s'pose the walk to town sobered him up some, otherwise I'd have seen it for myself."

"I was not drunk," Lebaudy indignantly protests. "Placide gave me only two cups of wine before I left—two cups, no more!" He points to a big cup, which will hold about a pint.

Everybody shouts and laughs. Lebaudy is one of those unfortunates who can not take one drink without it affecting his already dizzy brain. So much is known to all.

Somebody notices the paleness of Placide. A pale souse. He must be very drunk, and be in the habit of drinking, very heavily, in secret. Every one had thought differently. Ah, well!

So they decided to go back to town. You will see that there was little else they could do; and, besides, there was something about Nita that made them all uncomfortable. And uneasy. She seemed changed, in a way none of them could put a finger to; there were smoldering flames deep down in her slanting eyes, and there was something repulsive about the way she would run her red, thin tongue over her red, red lips, whenever she looked at them. More than one man caught himself making the sign of the cross, without at all knowing why. . . . Well, they say one can smell the Devil a long way off. So!

As they were going, some one saw Nita glide up to the peddler and make a swift motion with her fingers, while it seemed she hissed a few words in a tongue strange to all the rest of them. There was only one word that could be understood and remembered — no, I do not know what it was—but they say that it was afterward said by another gipsy who was asked, to mean *gold,* or *money.* . . . Later, too, one of those who saw, or heard of it, was inspired to show old yellow Marie, as well as he could remember, the sign he thought Nita made. And Marie, she laughed evilly. Being very drunk and in high humor, she finally gave a sly hint that it *might* mean something like *poison,* in a certain dark and secret sign language. (Have I told you it was said, by some, that Marie engaged in darker practises than the keeping of her dive?)

Afterward, Marie told Lebaudy that Nita probably was only fooling the peddler, so as not to frighten him. Placide, added this Marie, did not die of poisoning. More than that, she would not say a word.

One guess is as good as another; but they say there was a greedy look in the peddler's eyes as he listened to Nita. Perhaps there was a greedy look, likewise, in Nita's eyes. . . . But not for gold, one thinks. . . . The gipsy was a strong, full-blooded man—it may be that she wanted *him!*

WHATEVER it was that Nita said to the peddler, he went with LeBleu and the others when they rode back to town. For three or four days afterward, this peddler was busy mending his horse's harness and greasing his wagon; and he offered his stock of tinware at such cheap prices that he soon disposed of it. Getting ready to move on, he said. The third or fourth night, the gipsy disappeared.

Nobody was sorry to see him go, nor felt slighted that he left without saying good-bye. Then, a trapper stopped at Placide's cabin and discovered that it was deserted except for Placide himself, who was dead and therefore could hardly be said to count. He had been dead for some days and, it being warm as to weather, he was beginning to be unpleasant about it.

There was a curious wound, or maybe several wounds, in Placide's throat: part of him looked to have been eaten by a beast! Well, they buried him quickly.

I do not know what the coroner said about it, but other people lifted their eyebrows or shrugged their shoulders, saying:

"Placide died, or maybe his woman killed him; and the woman has run away with the peddler—after getting Placide's money! Ah, well, we are rid of the three of them: the peddler, Placide, and Placide's wife. . . . None of them amounted to much!"

Oddly enough, the peddler's horse was soon afterward found, dead and partly devoured, in a spot deep in the woods. Eh! People wondered at that, naturally. . . .

Then, one afternoon about a month after Lebaudy swore he saw Placide murder Nita, this same Lebaudy was back in the woods behind Placide's cabin, when he came upon a mound of freshly turned dirt that excited his curiosity.

The longer Lebaudy regarded the mound, the more excited he became. This looked suspiciously like a grave—and no human grave had the least right to be in that spot—that much he knew.

Now, it *was* a grave! When Lebaudy, with the aid of a shovel which he ran and fetched from Placide's old cabin, finally overcame his indecision and dug into the mound, he found a man's body! And whose do you suppose it was? *The peddler's!*

What? Indeed not! That is the curious part of it: this peddler's body was *not at all decomposed!* And there was the same sort of wound, or wounds, in his throat that Placide had — *and they were half healed!*

Lebaudy, one can imagine, was knocking about the knees. It was getting dusk, and that made things worse. He had reason enough to know that this body did not look as it ought to look, having been dead and covered with dirt. Whether it had been buried one day or ten, it looked too *fresh*. It surely wasn't breathing, it was dead, and yet—it looked as if there might be warm blood beneath its skin! And then——

Lebaudy leaned upon the wooden handle of the spade he had used, and which must have been cracked, already, for it snapped beneath his weight. He was thrown off balance, and, clutching the long handle of the spade tighter than ever, stumbled forward on the dry clods he had dug from the grave, and which rolled under his feet: he fell forward, you understand, with the spade handle thrust before him. And the sharp, broken end of the handle, with Lebaudy's weight behind it, *pierced the breast of the corpse at his feet!*

(Now, you will remember, this is Lebaudy's tale: I am only telling it for *him!* So!)

Well, this broken end of the spade handle, which was really a hardwood pole, was sharp and keen, and it pen-

etrated the corpse about where its heart should be. And the corpse *moved! The dead lips screamed!*

Then, the eyes opened wide (Lebaudy swears to this, although if *you* ask him, he will deny it!), with such hate in them that it was like a look into the mouth of hell. But the fury swiftly faded into a look of great *gladness,* like the eyes of a bird suddenly set free of a cage; the working features softened into a mask of peace and contentment; the eyes closed. While Lebaudy watched — *the body began to mortify!*

Lebaudy ran, to get out of that forest, where it was getting darker with each second—ran, too, to get away from that horror he had come upon. While he ran, it seemed that there was a patter of swift feet not far behind. Fear lent wings to his feet, until he came to the banks of the bayou upon which Placide's cabin stood.

THE woods did not come down quite to the bayou, where the land had been more or less cleared. It was lighter here, although the sun had sunk, and night was falling fast. Panting, Lebaudy stopped and looked back toward the trees. Running toward him from the forest was a woman, who slowed to a walk as he looked, too tired and shocked already to feel much fresh surprize at her appearance there. She came closer, so that he recognized her in the twilight.

It was Nita!

Lebaudy says she smiled at him; but it was the sort of smile that made new shivers crawl on that back of his.

"Good ev'nin'," he says, remembering that Nita did not speak French.

He wondered why Nita was licking her red lips with her redder tongue. (From the way he speaks of it, when he will, one understands that Lebaudy did not care for this, at all!) He felt uneasy, it was so queer, you comprehend, when Nita did not answer him. Not a word from her—just licking her lips, staring at him, with that strange smile.

Lebaudy, one assumes, was at a loss to understand this situation, the woman saying nothing, and looking at him in a way that he did not at all care for. Finally he tells her:

"I t'ought yo' run off wit' t' peddler?"

Nita laughed. . . . Lebaudy says he shivered at the sound!

It was getting darker all this time, and Nita moved closer to him: still not making a sound beyond that one hellish laugh. Lebaudy watched her with a funny feeling in his flat stomach; and then he let out a yell—or one assumes he did, knowing this Lebaudy!

He says that he was looking at the same eyes all the time (which one doubts, because he does not like to look people in the eyes!), but one minute they were the eyes of Nita—as he knew Nita—and the next minute they were the eyes of—well, what do you think? The eyes of a great bitch wolf! A great she-wolf with slavering jowls, and a red tongue running in and out between fangs that glinted faintly in the dusk!

The wolf (or whatever it was!) leaped at Lebaudy, who undoubtedly howled as much as any wolf as he also leaped—backward, into the bayou. Now, only a very stupid one, such as this one, would leap unthinking and unlooking when he knew he was standing on the bank of a bayou. Yet, it may be that this stupidity saved Lebaudy from death, or worse. He struggled in the water, while the wolf yowled and slavered on the bank. Lebaudy says its eyes were red as hell's fires by this time. Eh!

Well, one knows without being told, that a swamp rat like Lebaudy could swim, and the farther bank was not very

distant. He climbed up on it, and the wolf gave a last fiendish howl as Henry scampered off toward Labranch.

Wet and quaking, and feeling a certain need of stimulation, Lebaudy scurried in to old Marie's place, wet clothes and all. One drink, and Lebaudy would stand on his head. That is only an expression, you will understand, but it serves well for this old one, as what few brains he had would run out his mouth when he drank—which is a misfortune that might, perhaps, happen to a rattlebrain who stood too long upon his head in fact! However, if you understand me, he talked much when he drank a little.

He talked to Marie, telling her of his finding the corpse that was so different from other corpses, and of his meeting with Nita, or the wolf (or both-in-one), or whatever it was, on the bank of the bayou. Then he went back and told her the whole story in detail, from the time he had seen Placide throw Nita to the floor and hurl that desecrated crucifix into her throat. Before he had finished, Marie was so shaken that she was drinking her own rotgut liquor, and pouring more for Henry—all without charge to him!

"Ay-e-e!" she moaned. "The black crucifix, the black cat jumping across her body in the grave, licking her blood. Moonlight in her eyes while she's lying in her grave! Oh, Placide! Stupid Placide! Why did you not drive a stake through her heart when you buried her?"

"Eh?" says Henry Lebaudy, "What's all this you're talking about?"

"Loup-garou!" snarls Marie, who was raised among people who speak French much better than, and in preference to, English; and she had absorbed all the folk-lore of those French-descended people. (Marie's white blood, one assumes, came from the same sources as theirs.)

"Loup-garou!" shudders Lebaudy. (You comprehend that it is the French name for werewolf? So!) "I was afraid so, me!"

Marie brightens, after a minute.

"One good thing," she exults, "this Nita can't get off her island—and *I'm* not going *there!* Me, I don't intend to see her!"

Now, as you already know, Labranch bayou forks and flows into the bay in two separate streams, like a wishbone, making an island nearly fifteen miles long and about ten miles wide at the bay end. The point, you understand, is that the werewolf is supposed to be unable to cross running water. . . . What? The vampire, also? Exactly! This *loup-garou* which is, or was, Nita, is safely in a pen, unless she can get some one to carry her across the bayou in his arms—which I doubt!

There is only a little more to tell. Lebaudy, at Marie's urging, went with his tale to Father Soulin. Whether the good priest had a hand in it or not, I do not know: but the parish sexton (who, naturally enough, was not given to agitation in the presence of dead bodies) went into the woods and cut off the spade handle a little way above the peddler's body. After which he drove the end of the handle a little more firmly in the corpse, and then covered it up to rest in peace.

Now, of course, that left Placide to be looked after. The sexton sharpened the part of the spade handle (Placide's own spade handle!) that he had kept, and dealt with Placide as the peddler had been dealt with. *And Placide's wounds had healed,* although they had been greater by far than the peddler's; and he screamed and squirmed beneath the thrust of the stake, and settled back at peace, as the peddler had done. The sexton piled back the dirt on what had become, in a twinkling, a heap of bones and unpleasantness.

So (Delacroix concluded with a shrug of his shoulders), that is the tale as I have heard it. It happened, so they say, when I was a boy, and I did not live in this parish then. Father Soulin has been dead these four years past, so you can not ask him.

Me, I don't know. . . .

* * * * * * *

I DREW on my pipe for a couple of minutes, considering Delacroix's tale the while. Finally, I asked:

"What do you mean by saying you don't know? You don't believe any of that, do you?"

Delacroix merely gave repetition to his frequent and noncommital shrug; and I knew that, for all his better education and larger contact with the world, he would be as taciturn as any of his ilk when conversation took a turn he did not like.

I was sleepy, by this time, and smothered a yawn.

"All right," I laughed, "I'm going on over to my tent and turn in, and I hope none of those werewolves who have to lie in their graves between sun-up and sundown have come to life tonight, to catch me on the way, nor come uninvited into my tent."

"They can't enter a house without an invitation," Delacroix rejoined, in all seriousness, "and one supposes that will apply to a tent, likewise."

I was tempted to laugh at his earnestness, but I had no wish to wound his sensibilities, and so refrained.

"Perhaps, after all," he said, "it would be better if you were to sleep with me while you are here. . . . Yes?"

"No," I carelessly shook my head, "I'll go on over——"

At this moment I broke off, as there came a light tapping upon the door of the shack.

To this day, I do not know why one of us did not say, "Come in." Instead, Delacroix, who was sitting close to the door, merely reached out and lifted the latch, the poorly hung door swinging inward of its own accord. At that, surprize kept either one of us from speaking for a minute, although I had sufficient presence of mind to rise from my seat upon a cracker box and say, "Good evening."

Standing just outside the doorway, framed in the light from within, was one of the most beautiful women (she was, apparently, little more than a girl) that I have ever seen. She was clad in rough, serviceable corduroy riding-breeches and flannel shirt, and I could see a laced boot on the one leg that the shadows failed to screen from my view.

Even though she was so clad—I write these next words with considerable deliberateness!—*in garments that she could have obtained from any chance hunter in the swamps around us,* provided he were of slight stature; even, I say, though she was clad in such garments, there was no hiding the alluring femininity of her.

Before I could find wits and voice to speak to this astonishing apparition, the girl smiled and herself spoke—dashing my illusions. Her words, although there was an additional odd inflection, were the words of any unlettered Cajun girl of the swamp country.

"Ma car," she informed us, "it's bogged down on de ot'er side de bayou; an' ma ankle, Ah sprained it tryin' t' gat out. . . . Will yo' gen'leman he'p me?"

However, if her words were crude, her voice was not, and there was a wistful note in it that touched me. I could see, now, that she was leaning heavily on a stick, and the boot had been removed from one stockingless foot. She moved the foot, as if to ease its pain, so that it

was more in the light. . . . Unshod feet that are beautiful are a rarity in women. . . . I had been out in the swamps with a road camp for two long months; and, Cajun or no Cajun, this was Woman—and a beautiful woman, at that. As Delacroix would put it: Well!

"Certainly we will help you!" I was very gallant about it, hoping she would not be too fastidious to overlook my two days' growth of beard. I had another thought: bold, but maybe. . . . "And," I said, "as I see you can not stand upon that foot—I'll carry you back across the bridge!"

I started at the look of wild exultation that leaped into the girl's wonderful eyes, enchanting with their vague suggestion of the Orient, before she dropped her gaze.

"No!" yelled Delacroix, to my utter astonishment and indignation. *"Carry her across running water?* No! Never!"

My anger was flaring swiftly, and then I caught sight of the girl. I stopped the hot rejoinder I had upon my tongue for Delacroix, appalled with doubt and something more.

There was a positively feral light in those glorious eyes, now; and that seductive mouth had ceased to be such. With lips drawn back from her teeth (queer that I had not before noticed how sharp and cruelly pointed they seemed—like *fangs!),* she resembled more some slavering beast than the girl who, but a moment before, had made my pulses hum.

"Landry!" Delacroix was yelling, "bring your gun, the one with the silver bullets—*she's* here!"

The girl leaped away toward the swamp growth — there was no sign of lameness in her going. I had a vague, confused impression that she looked oddly inhuman, and *dropped to all fours* as she reached the shelter of the forest!

Old Landry, he of the weathered face and gnarled hands who had first mentioned Placide's wife that night, came running up. There was a huge revolver in one of those knotted fists.

Delacroix spoke to him in the French *patois* of the region, of which I knew enough to get the gist.

"Yes, it was *she*—but you are too late! She has reached the woods and you dare not follow—she and her pack would have your throat open before you knew they were near!"

"Silver bullets," was all I could understand of Landry's answer, taut as it was with suppressed emotion. Then, hoarsely, in which occurred the words, "My son," he croaked something else.

Delacroix shook his head. "Avenge him, and all the others, when the odds are even. Wait until you have another chance in the open."

"Eleven years!" said Landry, quite distinctly. "For so long have I carried this gun loaded with silver bullets blessed by the good Father—the only kind that can kill *them!*—waiting to use it."

Again Delacroix shook his head.

"We will be five or six months getting the road across the island. There will be other chances: you have waited eleven years, and you can surely wait a few months longer."

Delacroix slowly shut the door; and Landry plodded back to resume his disturbed rest . . . perhaps.

"You will sleep here tonight." It was a statement, simply made.

I nodded, as simply. Then, once more, I felt a shiver run along my spine——

From the forest, like the baying of Cerberus chained and lashed to fury by all the demons of the pit, came again that fiendish ululation—came the baffled howl of Placide's wife.

THE SECOND-HAND LIMOUSINE

By HAROLD MARKHAM

A peculiar weird tale is this, about a limousine that was fated to have an accident

"SO YOUR last job, O'Doyle," commented Mr. Mosgrave as he read over his prospective chauffeur's credentials, "was with the New York police?"

"That is so, sor. A speed cop I was till I lost me job through the foolishness of me in copping the wrong man."

"Ah! You ran in some millionaire's car, or some politician's?"

"About that, sor."

"And now you're over here in Canada looking for work?"

"True, sor. An' before I left Ireland ye'll see——"

"Quite, quite; you were a gentleman's chauffeur till he cut and ran from the Sinn Feiners. Well, O'Doyle, I think you look more my man than the others I've had, and we'll go and see the car!"

With a deep sigh of relief Pat followed his new boss to the garage, helped him roll back the heavy doors and then stood staring in wonder and amazement before the most magnificent limousine he had ever clapped eyes on.

"Good car, O'Doyle?"

"I'd be saying she was, sor."

Mosgrave chuckled and rubbed his hands. "Eight cylinders, O'Doyle. Takes any hill on high, short of the Rockies, and runs with as much noise as an infant breathing in its sleep. There's not another like her on the road; and I can swear to that as she was built specially for the man who had her before me."

"Will ye be telling me she's second hand, sor? An' her so new and fresh!"

"*Care's* done that, O'Doyle. She's had better attention, let me tell you, than a few men give their wives and children—and that's what I'll expect from you, d'ye see? I want perfection and I can pay for it. Two hundred dollars a month, what do you say to that?"

Pat heard him like a man in a dream. "Ye mean ye'll be taking me on at that wage, sor?"

"I said so, didn't I? Don't stand gaping there like a fool, man! You impress me with being the type of servant I want; better than those chicken-hearted—ahem—those incompetent idiots who were here before you, anyway. Now cut along to the pantry, as we seem to understand each other, and my butler will tell you anything else you want to know. You start work tomorrow morning."

Still only half able to credit his good luck, Pat went as he was told and soon found that the comfort of his new quarters and the lightness of his work were up to the same high standard as his princely wage. A fleeting glimpse of an exceptionally pretty, dark-haired housemaid down one of the passages was all he needed to convince him that he had most emphatically fallen on his feet.

"HOW d'you find the car, O'Doyle?" asked the English-imported butler as he came in the following afternoon from his first drive.

"Sure, Mr. Pryce," Pat grinned,

"The clawed hand was raised."

"she'll be just a holy angel on four wheels! If that chassis alone cost under ten thousand dollars I'll be after eatin' me new livery."

The butler coughed. "I have no doubt, O'Doyle, she is as valuable as you say; but, between ourselves, the governor paid *nothing* for her."

Pat stared. "You'll be saying she was given to him, then?"

"No, O'Doyle, not quite that. He *took* her in exchange for a bad debt."

"Some debt!"

"No, not a particularly heavy one. The gentleman who owned her before, so I understand, had come down in the world, and, being of an unbusinesslike turn of mind, let her go for less than a quarter of her value. I am not wholly familiar with the story, but——"

"Well?"

The Englishman pursed his lips. "You are satisfied with the car yourself?"

"Satisfied, is it? Holy Mother! And why wouldn't I be?"

"Oh, I have no particular reason in asking, O'Doyle, save that you are the fifth chauffeur Mr. Mosgrave has had in the last three months; in point of fact, since he has had the car."

Pat whistled. "Sure, he must be the hard man to satisfy, then!"

"That would be the case, had Mr. Mosgrave discharged the men; but he did not. They all left of their own free will—without notice!"

And then, before Pat could question the old man further, in came Elise, the pretty housemaid, with news that the family had decided to drive into town for a theater that evening and that the car would be wanted by such-and-such a time.

PAT was already so far gone in love with Elise that her mere appearance put all thought of Mr. Mosgrave's automobile transaction out of his mind; but he was to have his interest in the matter reawakened that same evening in a way he little suspected as he gave the red limousine a final and wholly needless polish, got into his silver-buttoned coat and smart, peaked cap, and drove round to the front door.

Having deposited the family at the theater entrance, he parked the car in the nearest available parking-place and settled down to a novelette and smokes.

For about half an hour he read, and then looked up with an uncomfortable feeling that a pair of eyes were riveted on his own. A pair of once-gray, red-rimmed and bloodshot eyes they were; the eyes of a down-and-out, far gone in dope or drink. They were set in a haggard, parchment face, and their owner was a shrunken, starved-looking old man whose clothing was of a nondescript slovenliness.

"You drive this car, now?" rasped the stranger.

"I do that, being the chauffeur!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Number six, is it not so? Yes—the sixth man, eh? And are you satisfied with your situation?"

"Sure, and what else would I be?"

The old man gritted his teeth. "You have found nothing strange—no?"

"Divil a thing, me buck!"

The bloodshot eyes narrowed. "You have yet time, chauffeur. I would try for a fresh job, if I were you."

"And who the divil may you be, then, tellin' me——?"

A skinny, gnarled hand commanded silence. "I once owned the car!"

For a moment Pat was half of a mind to bid the old fellow be off; then he became aware of a strange dignity, a singular force about him which somehow compelled belief. Pat remembered Mr. Pryce's story of the previous owner who had come down in the world. He nodded sympathetically.

"So you'll be a friend of my boss?" he asked.

The red eyes blazed at him. "A friend? *Sacré nom du diable!* I believed him my friend once. May hell yawn for all such friends and for the fools that serve them! Listen to me, chauffeur; I was once rich and respected—ask anyone in Quebec you please about Professor Levine—I was a scientist and famous; but, alas, I had no head for business. Your cursed pig of a master was my lawyer and he fleeced me—fleeced me of every cent. He even took my beloved car at a beggar's price and—*Grand Dieu!* Can you not understand? She was my invention, my darling—there was not another like her—and he robbed me of her as he robbed me of everything else and kept within the law so cunningly that I had no earthly redress. But"—he came a pace forward and rested a skinny forefinger on the chauffeur's arm—"*earthly* redress, *mon ami,* is not the only kind. You take me? Never mind. You would not comprehend me, anyhow; but be well advised and take a different work—you may not escape so easily as the others, for in their time my power was not so

strong as it is now. No more: I have warned you—*adieu!*"

He was across the street before Pat could reply, and vanished, a bent, stringy figure, round the corner.

Pat had jumped out, half intending to follow him; but he reckoned on second thought that the chase wasn't worth risking the sack for leaving his car unattended; and so he turned back again.

"Say," he asked the next chauffeur in the line, "can ye be telling me of a Professor Levine by any chance?"

The man blew a whiff from his cigarette. "Sure. Professor Levine? He was a scientific guy—French extraction—bit of an inventor, they say. And—hold on—yes! There was something else about him: he got the sack from the McGill University for something or other. Can't say exactly what; it was rather hushed up; but I fancy some of his experiments got him up against the governing body."

"Would you be knowing him by sight?"

"Yep. Seen his photo in the *Globe* at the time. A hefty guy with a mane o' black hair."

Pat looked hastily the way his strange visitor had gone.

"Hefty an' with black hair, is it? Then that one that's just left me will be a lunatic at large; for he was after telling me himself was Professor Levine!"

The other yawned. "These bums'll tell any yarn for the price of a drink," he said, and began to roll a new cigarette.

Pat snapped his teeth a few times.

"Sure, but I'll be letting the boss know about him, fer all that. There was something little short of the fires of hell in those eyes!"

If O'Doyle thought to earn praise from his master for warning him of the lunatic stranger, as he did the following afternoon, he was in for a sore disappointment.

"Levine?" snapped Mosgrave. "What the devil do you know about Professor Levine?"

"Sure, sor, and no more than I've told ye. I thought, maybe, that this mad divil——"

"Nonsense! Levine is utterly harmless—I've seen him run shivering from a small dog, myself; added to which, the man's touched in his head. And look here, O'Doyle, I don't like having my servants discuss my affairs with chance acquaintances in the street, and if you wish to keep your place you'll forget this absurd business and let me hear no more of it!"

"But, sor——"

"That will be all. You may leave me!"

Inwardly fuming, O'Doyle left his boss's study, and, had he not run across Elise almost immediately after doing so, the chances are that he would have given notice the same day.

"Sure, and it's himself seems out of his mind entirely!" he complained to her. "And it would be a milder man than Pat O'Doyle that would stand for such impudence if there weren't the prettiest peach this side of the ocean in this divil-taken old house!"

"Oh, *Patreek!*" blushed Elise. Then, quickly serious, "But my boy, what is eet that you have seen—you tell me?"

The genuine anxiety of the pretty French-Canadian was obvious. Pat sought to laugh it away as he made light of his strange encounter.

"One thing's certain, anyway," he concluded, "the old gent *was* Professor Levine!"

"Ah, *mais oui!*" she sighed. "It was him. *Patreek,* you will be ver' careful—for my sake—is it not?"

He laughed outright. "Is it driving the boss's car into the ditch you'd have me doing? Glory be, me darling, that's not

Pat O'Doyle! Or would ye have me be frightened out of a good job by a scraggy, half-starved old divil with eyes like a half-blind setter? What will be frightening ye, then, Mavourneen?"

She frowned prettily and looked down before answering.

"I do not know. Pat*reek,*" she looked up into his face, "it was the old gentleman frightened away the other men. . . . 'Old gentleman?' *Ma foi!* He *was* 'the old gentleman,' *certainement!* You know how I mean? The old gentleman from hell!"

Pat didn't laugh, this time. The girl was too plainly scared.

"What would ye have me be doing, then?" he asked.

She looked at him steadily a moment. "Is it that you love me, Pat*reek?*"

"May the divil take me, otherwise!"

"Then—oh, do not stop here!—is it not that the government will give you land and lend you money to start up country? Could not we two——?"

" 'Tis a rancher ye'd have me be? But why, when there's a good job like this for the asking and the two of us together?"

She shook her head determinedly. "You have seen the professor: it is enough. You will do as Elise begs you and leave here like the others."

"But what was there entirely to frighten them others?"

"I tell you I do not know, but, oh Pat*reek,* I would die to think of you out alone in that car on a country road, at night!"

Her last words came out with a rush and, speaking them, she threw herself on his chest in a flood of tears. To all his questions she would only answer: "No, no—you no believe—you would laugh at me!" And as they were still thus arguing a bell rang and Elise had quickly to dry her eyes and run off.

Pat strolled out to the garage and there, not ten minutes later, she came to him, white-faced, moving with little, frightened starts, a few steps at a time. Inside the garage, she leant against the door-post and for some moments would not or could not speak. At last she pulled herself together.

"Pat*reek,*" she told him, "it is as I feared it would soon be—the worst. You are to drive out to Corbineuf—all that way—and return tonight. See, a letter from the boss. You are to deliver and bring back the answer tonight."

He frowned. "But what of it? I'll be back by 10 o'clock!"

She nodded wearily. "After the dark, *mais oui!* Oh, Pat*reek,* will you not refuse to go—for my sake?"

"Sure an' I would if ye'd give me the least reason to offer the boss for doing so!"

"I can not—you do not believe, nor would he. *Hélas,* I see it will be useless to plead with you. Go! Take your letter—and take *this!*"

She thrust into his hand a small, irregular, hard object, wrapped in a handkerchief.

"What will that be?"

"You must not look, not now. You might laugh and refuse to take him and then—*mon Dieu,* I should die of fear—look at him when you are out and on the road. And now—good-bye, Pat*reek,* and may *le bon Dieu* protect you!"

She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately, as a woman might kiss a man she knew was bound for certain death. Then, releasing him as suddenly, she ran out of the garage in tears.

HE SLIPPED Elise's present into a pigeon-hole for maps and other things on the off-side of his dashboard and gave it no more thought till he was on his way home.

"And me forgetting that!" he reproached himself, pulling up by the side of the bleak, empty road.

It was just turning dusk. He slipped off the india-rubber ring which closed the little parcel and unfolded the handkerchief, which he noticed was of fair, white linen, an unusually good one for a servant girl. What he saw brought his eyebrows together in a frown. The girl's present was a little ivory cross.

"Glory be!" muttered O'Doyle. "Was it spiritual dangers she was after fearing for me?"

He shook his head soberly and laid the cross down on a shelf which ran above the dashboard.

" 'Tis the queer girl she is an' no mistake. Eyah, but I must be getting a move on, though, or the boss'll be wondering where I've got to, and him so mad on the precious darling of a car when she's out of his sight, an' all!"

He let in his clutch, and the red limousine purred gently forward, her headlights sweeping a silver-clear ribbon of road ahead of him in the quickly gathering gloom.

For some miles or so Pat drove along whistling carelessly a ragtime which had been new when he chased speed-hogs over the American roads. The dark closed in, making the car feel compact and snug as he sat back in his buff-upholstered seat, hands and toe working mechanically on accelerator and wheel.

From time to time he glanced up at the little, rectangular driving-mirror above the windshield and it was from this he got his hint of anything strange.

"Holy Mother,"said Pat to himself, "if that's a car behind me her lights are as near dead as a hog at the business entrance of a Chicago pork factory!"

The reddish glow from behind irritated him and he accelerated a little to escape from the supposed following car.

A minute or two later he muttered a swear-word to himself; for, even with an extra ten miles an hour added to what he had been doing, the unpleasant, reddish glow was still there.

"The divil take ye!" said Pat; "if it's a race you're after, get on with it and pass! Would I be speeding the boss's car, and the road as dark as the bottomless pit?"

He flicked on the switch of his electric signal to "Pass" and slowed down. Still the other car, if car it were, hung behind him.

"Oh well, then, have it your own way and bad cess to you!" he growled, and, again whistling, went on at his original speed.

He was whistling, though he scarcely realized it, an old hymn tune which he had learnt at his mother's knee, away back in the old days in County Clare.

After a while, as he glanced up again, he noticed that the light had vanished.

"So ye've pulled up, have ye?" he said to the looking-glass. "And good luck to ye! It'll be no good you're up to, I fancy, stopping in a lonely spot like this one and under cover of the dark an' all! Some bootleggers makin' for the frontier I should—hullo!"

The light had returned.

It was at that moment O'Doyle began to sense something definitely uncanny about it. His car ran so silently that one could normally hear the swish of her tires on the road; surely, then, one would hear a following car's engine, unless that car were of some equally high-class and silent make. And, if she were, was it likely her lamps would be in such poor condition as to throw this strange, flame-red light?

He slowed down unconsciously as the problem crossed his mind.

The light became intensified in the mirror; it seemed to swirl and curl like

water, stirred with a rod. It was no such light as any car's headlights ever threw!

"Holy Mother!" said Pat in a whisper, "it looks as if it were trying to crystallize entirely!"

Without thinking, he jammed down his foot on the accelerator and the red limousine shot forward. The light seemed to weaken and struggle like a live thing.

"I don't like the look of ye," he admitted aloud, "and it's glad I'll be when I've out-distanced ye!"

As if his very words could have had some effect on it the light quivered and drew together into a dull red circle. Then Pat realized the truth.

"Mother of God!" he gasped; "it comes from inside the car!"

As he spoke he accelerated further—he was already little short of sixty miles an hour—and threw the car round a stiff bend, literally on two wheels. Out of the tail of his eye he glanced back and saw the very thing he most feared to see: the road was empty, though the light was still glowing and wriggling in the mirror.

He realized that for no guerdon earth had to offer would he pull up, still less glance back through the glass screen which separated him from the rest of the car.

His mind went back to 1917—the night he had lain wounded out in No Man's Land for two hours, dreading each moment that the enemy he could not see were stealing up behind him with the bayonet. Those were his very feelings with regard to that light in the back of his master's car!

What was it?

Could there be anything in Levine's warning, in Elise's misgivings?

He was racing so, by now, that he needed both hands to keep the car on the road. Something told him that his life—his very soul—depended on keeping up the pace. A moment later he knew why. . . .

The light dimmed down, flickered, and went out; only for an instant, though. Two small, red spots replaced it — red orbs, set in a green-grayish phosphorescence—two round, red eyes.

With a sob of terror O'Doyle sagged over the wheel and his very fear seemed to lend life to the thing behind him.

A mouth, toothless, shapeless and infinitely, foully lustful—nostrils—a hand, taloned like the claw of some noisome bird. . . . .

At that moment he came to a steep incline, flung the car at it with all the impetus of her full eighty miles an hour, and sobbed hysterically as he found that even her powerful eight cylinders would not hold such a speed against that remorseless rise.

Seventy-five—seventy—sixty-five. . . .

The red eyes swelled, the abominable face one vast leer of appetite. . . .

He worked his ignition feverishly, but to no purpose. The clawed hand was raised—he could swear he heard those talons grate and scratch on the intervening glass. . . .

"Oh, God, deliver me!" he wept; and then his eyes lit on Elise's ivory cross.

He was now doing fifty-nine miles an hour. Dare he let go with one hand, just for a moment, and reach out?

The mirror showed a dun cloud on the glass behind him, a cloud as if of some hot, noisome breath.

His hand shot out, clutched the cross.

"Oh, God, deliver me!" he repeated, holding it up. "And, praise be, He has done that thing!" he added, laughing foolishly—for the creature had shriveled up into itself and vanished.

A quarter of an hour later he turned aside for the hamlet of La Marcelette,

and, drawing up before the priest's house, knocked with agonized fists upon the door.

HIS guest being uable to sleep, Father Chatillon sat up with him by the fire.

"You have had a narrow escape, my son."

"Sure, Father!" The chauffeur's teeth still chattered a little. "'Tis meself know's that. But what was the thing entirely?"

The priest shook his white head.

"I am not sure, O'Doyle. There *are* such spirits of evil, conjured up by the thoughts of evil men. If the thought be strong enough it can, as it were, solidify into a being animated by the same passion which aroused the thought; and I believe it was such a one that sought to attack you. I have never had such an experience, myself; but I have met others who have, and know that it is not uncommon for these thought forms to be attached by their authors to inanimate objects, such as a house, a ship, or an automobile. You may be thankful, my son, for your sweetheart's forethought in providing you with that blessed cross!"

Pat nodded fervently and the old priest rose and drew the blind.

"See," he continued, "the dawn has broken. You will be safe to drive on, now."

ARRIVING home, Pat was not surprized to learn that his master wanted him at once.

"What the devil kept you from coming back last night?" grumbled Mosgrave. "You know perfectly well I detest having my car in a strange garage. Is that my letter? Well, don't let such a thing occur again, O'Doyle. You understand me?"

"Very good, sor."

He turned to go, and Mosgrave called him back.

"One moment—there will be an answer to this."

"Yes, sor?"

"You will have to drive over—no, confound it!—Mrs. Mosgrave will be needing the car this afternoon. You will have to leave when you bring her in; and don't let me have you stopping out all night, this time."

Pat hesitated. "Beg pardon, sor; will ye be telling me to drive that way again in the dark, sor?"

"Well?"

"Because, sor, I—I—I'd rather not."

Mosgrave scowled at him. "Now what in thunder d' you mean by that?"

O'Doyle told him.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he barked. "I'll tell you what your trouble is, my man—it's whisky! You were drunk, that's what you were, and I've a good mind to discharge you for it! Damn it, you might have wrecked my——"

"I'll thank ye, sor!" Pat interrupted fiercely. "I was no more drunk than yerself is at this moment and ye can spare yerself the trouble of discharging me because I'm off within the hour and ye can drive your car yourself and drive her to the divil, if it please ye—an' that's that!"

He slammed out of the room and down to the servants' hall.

"Elise, me darling," he announced. "I'm leaving this house within the hour. Is it leaving with me you'll be and we'll apply for that land ye spoke of and go where folks lives clean and the divil is kept the right side of the door?"

"You are going—Pat*reek*—and we get married?"

"The divil an aught else! I've me old bike and side-car in the shed and it's off we'll be this moment to La Marcelette where me good friend Father Chatillon

will make the man and wife of us! What say ye, Mavourneen? Shall we do that thing?"

FATHER CHATILLON would not be denied but the bridal couple should stop the night at his house; so that they were among the first, next morning, to hear the news Pierre Crepaud, the carrier, brought into the village.

"He is dead, Father," announced Pierre, "dead on the Quebec road a hundred meters beyond the crucifix—dead under his car; and his face—*Dieu,* it was not good for a man to see!"

"You had better not come, Mrs. O'Doyle," said the good father, putting on his hat. "And you, Pat, had best stop with her."

When he returned, slow of step and grave of face, he took Pat aside and told him what else there was to hear.

"A dark red limousine. The speed must have been terrible, to judge by the condition of the car. The man? Yes, from your description I would be certain he was your late master . . . from your description and *other things*——"

"Other things, Father?"

Father Chatillon nodded. "Yes. The look on his face, as Pierre told us, was not good to see. Also"—he shuddered and crossed himself—"his throat was bruised and torn as if he had been strangled by powerful, taloned fingers. Poor soul"—the priest's voice shook with emotion—"he had no cross with him and could not reach the other one in time!"

Coming Soon!

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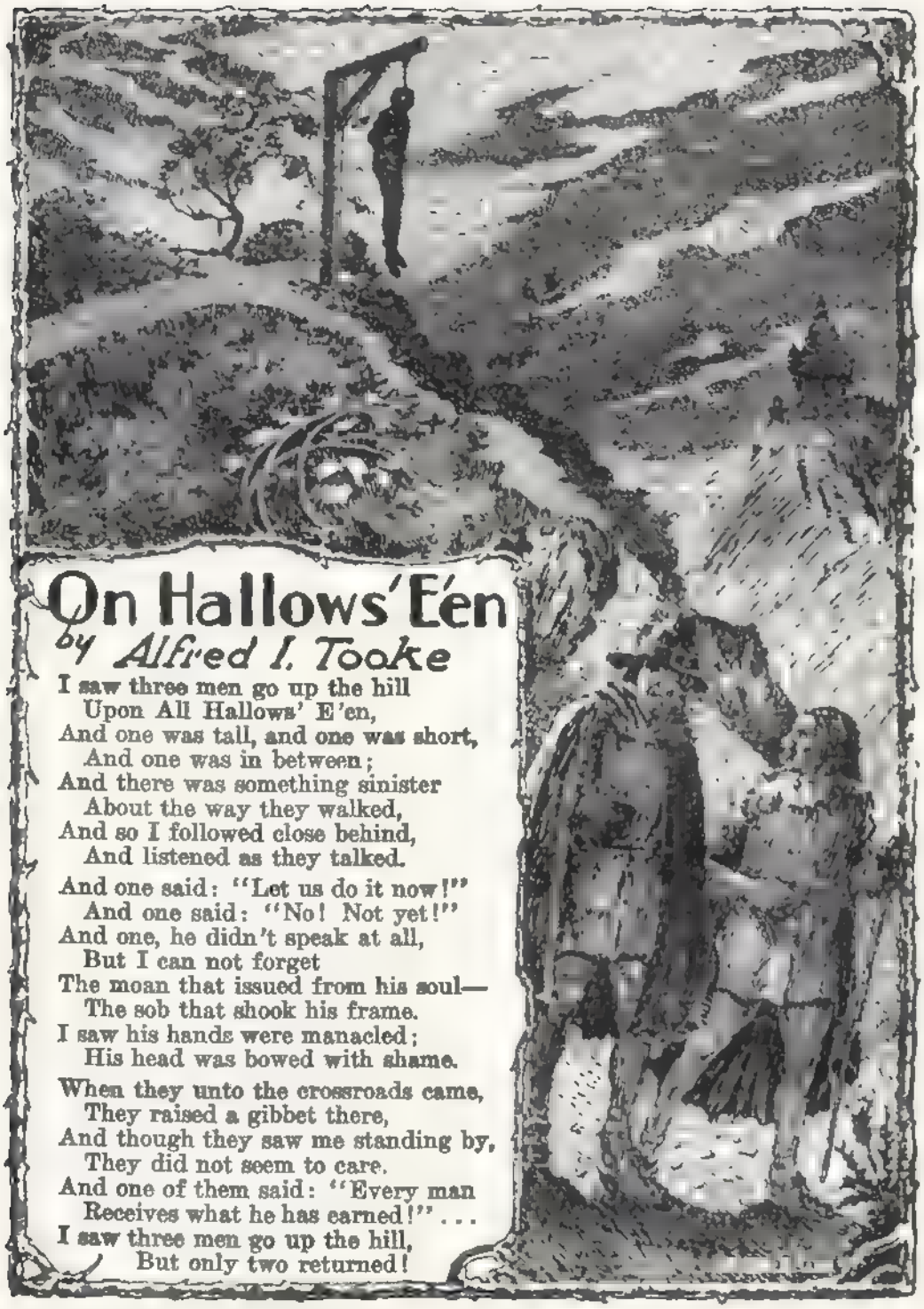
WEIRD TALES



On Hallows' E'en

by Alfred I. Tooke

I saw three men go up the hill
  Upon All Hallows' E'en,
And one was tall, and one was short,
  And one was in between;
And there was something sinister
  About the way they walked,
And so I followed close behind,
  And listened as they talked.

And one said: "Let us do it now!"
  And one said: "No! Not yet!"
And one, he didn't speak at all,
  But I can not forget
The moan that issued from his soul—
  The sob that shook his frame.
I saw his hands were manacled;
  His head was bowed with shame.

When they unto the crossroads came,
  They raised a gibbet there,
And though they saw me standing by,
  They did not seem to care.
And one of them said: "Every man
  Receives what he has earned!" . . .
I saw three men go up the hill,
  But only two returned!

SUBTERRANEA

By W. ELWYN BACKUS

An unusual novelette about a strange land lying several miles beneath the Egyptian Pyramids, and startling adventures therein

1. The Enigma of the Sphinx

"BUT, Ahmid, how do you know these things if neither you nor your father nor your father's father, and his, have seen them?"

Thus spoke Trent Allison, skeptically amused despite the gullibility usually accredited to the youthful. The sun-withered guide had been regaling him and his companion, Hugh Ghent, with a weird legend concerning the centuries-old mystery of the Sphinx and the pyramids before which it had crouched, watching, for ages; a legend of another world, already hinted at by a few scientists who were unafraid of ridicule.

"The story was told each generation by its elders, *effendi,* from far back in the dim past. Yet it was only revealed to me in a dream recently how this secret may now be uncovered. Because you saved me but yesterday from the brutal wrath of that merchant—may Allah wither his right arm!—from whom I but tried to borrow a tawdry bolt of cloth, I will share with you and your friend this secret. Besides, you are strong in heart and limb, while I am too old to cope alone with the dangers of such a journey."

Allison, whom the Arab addressed, smiled tolerantly, his keen steel-gray eyes studying the wrinkled brown countenance before him. Entertaining fellows, these strange men of the desert, with their queer yarns and queerer superstitions. This one seemed deadly in earnest, however. Allison glanced carelessly at Ghent. To his surprize, that ordinarily incredulous individual appeared genuinely interested.

"What do you make of the yarn, Hugh?"

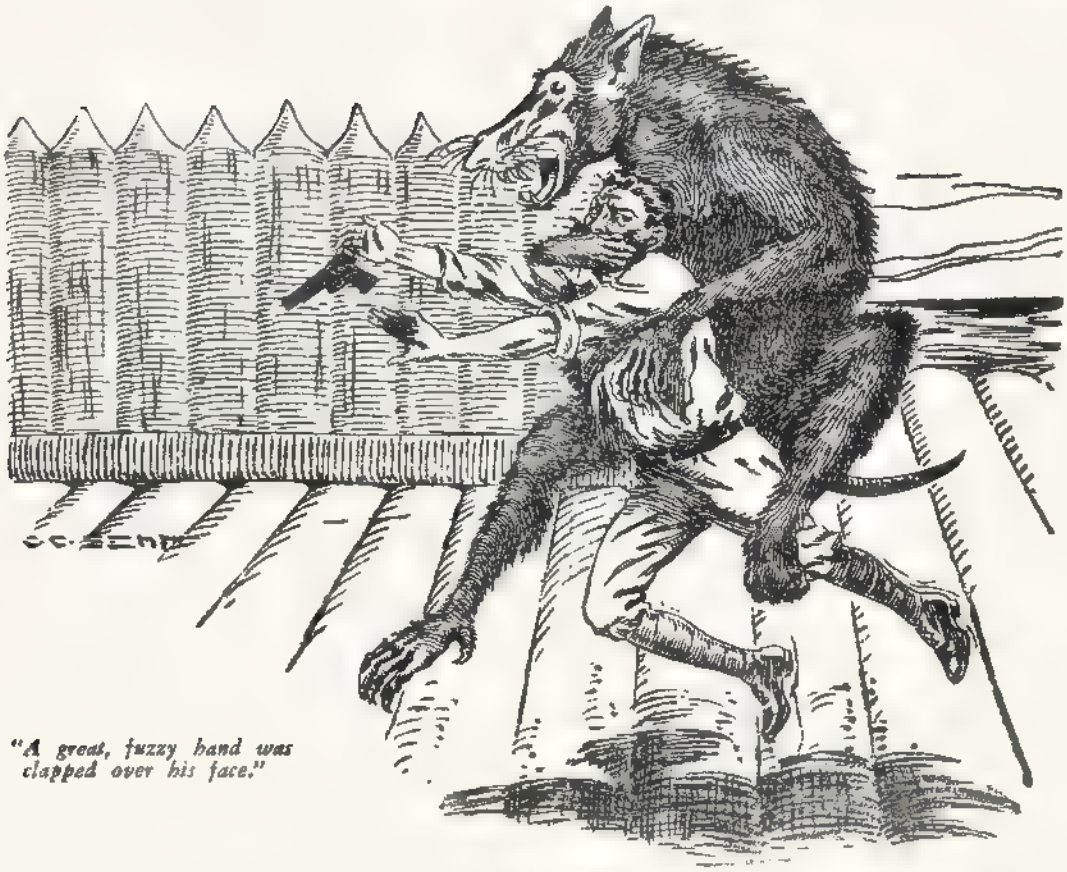
A cynical smile creased the other's handsome face. Topping Allison's five-feet-eleven by a good inch, and a single month older than he, he maintained a certain air of seniority that at times irked Allison. But the pair had gone through Princeton inseparable companions; Ghent the football hero, Allison the track star. Now they were doing what they had long planned—strolling round the world together before settling down to the serious things of life, in which Allison hoped to become a geologist of some usefulness.

"I think he's a lying scoundrel," was the reply. "Doubtless working up an extra fee for poking around with us, looking for something that doesn't exist. Still——"

"Still?"

"He *is* a convincing sort of beggar. I'm curious to see how far he'll go to back up his extraordinary lies. . . . Travel onward, Omar the tarpaulin-maker—and may God help your useless mahogany hide when you admit you've been playing us for a couple of Yankee suckers!"

THE sun was climbing fast above the horizon as the trio left their camels in the shadow of the Great Pyramid of Ghizeh. Silently the companions followed their guide to the side of that towering mass of stone in which was an opening known as a passageway to what is called the queen's and the king's chambers, also to a subterranean room far below.



"A great, fuzzy hand was clapped over his face."

Into this passageway they ventured, and presently reached a point where it split, one branch running upward and the other steeply downward. They chose the latter, Ahmid lighting the way ahead with a small lantern he produced from somewhere among the folds of his voluminous garment.

"Do you suppose the old brigand could be leading us into a trap?" Ghent whispered, evidently half in earnest.

"We're behind him, aren't we?" said Allison significantly, patting the hard bulge that marked an automatic strapped under his shirt. "Besides"—thoughtfully—"didn't the French scientists actually find water from wells they drilled in the Sahara to teem with aquatic animal life! Maybe there's something in that yarn of his after all."

In time and by dint of some scrambling to the accompaniment of muttered imprecations upon Ahmid's unwashed head, they arrived in the subterranean room. Here Ahmid set the lantern down. After a slow look around, he began feeling carefully along the base of the northern wall.

"We'll have to wait a bit while he tickles those stones long enough to save his face with us," grinned Ghent.

"I'm not so sure he's not in earnest," said Allison. "Let's give him a chance, anyway."

They stared curiously about them, at the forbidding dark walls and ceiling, and into the mysterious corners of the chamber that was but an infinitesimal part of the gigantic structure erected by those super-craftsmen of dim ages past. The

enigma of the pyramids! Would modern man ever really solve it?—would *they*, perhaps, unlock its real secret?

Not the least amazing thing about this mountain of masonry was its huge base, which formed a square that was almost perfect to an inch. More astounding was the fact that its ancient builders had so placed it as to face squarely toward the true north, which modern scientists ages later had succeeded in establishing only after exhaustive and intricate calculation. The Great Pyramid proved its builders profound students of astronomy as well as craftsmen of herculean skill.

A sudden exhalation from their guide jerked their attention back to him.

"It is true—my dream is come true!" Ahmid was crying. Evidently he, too, had had doubts. "It is here!" He stood pointing toward the floor at his feet.

Almost as excited, Allison and Ghent joined him. A black opening the size of one stone flag yawned before them.

"Here. Give me that lantern," commanded Ghent, grabbing it away from the chattering brown man. He swung it down the gaping hole.

At first nothing but inky emptiness was to be seen. Then happened something that shook their nerves sadly. In his own excitement, Ghent let the wire bail slip out of his fingers.

Their startled eyes followed the lantern as it shot downward. It grew steadily smaller, plunging deeper and deeper into the apparently bottomless hole. Abruptly it flickered out, probably from the rush of the air. Or had some heavy, poisonous gas below snuffed out that brave spark?

In the darkness they waited instinctively, breathlessly, for the sound of breaking glass that should herald the striking of the lantern upon the bottom of that vast shaft, or for the splash of water if no solid bottom was exposed.

After what seemed an age, a faint tinkle came to them. Oddly enough, they drew mutual sighs, as of relief, at the sound.

"Great Jehoshophat!" gasped Ghent, the first to regain his speech; "it must be half a mile deep. Ugh. Let's get out of this damned catacomb."

But to Allison's ears that tinkle had not sounded quite like breaking glass. On second thought, it seemed to him that it had been more like the mere glancing touch of the lantern as it sped parallel with a smooth stone wall—in which case they had not yet heard it strike bottom!

Something else. He had an impression of shallow steps cut in one side of that shaft, half glimpsed before the light of the hurtling lantern had sputtered out.

2. *Pharaoh's Well*

YOUTH and fools, 'tis said, rush in where angels fear to tread. Thus, two days later, we find Allison and Ghent with the imperturbable Ahmid and a camel-load of provisions, ropes and other paraphernalia, all deposited under cover of a moonless night at the entrance to the Great Pyramid. They had no wish to run afoul of the authorities over rights of exploration and exploitation, nor over a certain matter of wealth hinted at by Ahmid.

They stampeded their camels, proceeding forthwith to shoulder their individual packs; with which, at last, they arrived again in the subterranean room. Here Ahmid promptly and unconcernedly reopened the secret shaft.

Equipped now with brilliantly burning acetylene lanterns, they quickly discerned a narrow and disconcertingly shallow flight of steps cut into one of the stone sides of the shaft and disappearing into the blackness below. The back part of each of these steps was depressed, leaving

a ridge along the outer edge which offered a grip not unlike the rung of a ladder.

A lantern was lowered the entire length of a ball of twine, to test the air. It continued to burn brightly, but showed no trace of bottom.

"How do we know this thing *has* a bottom?" queried Ghent, thoughtfully.

"It is artificial—built by human hands," offered Allison, "so there *must* be an end to it."

"It'll probably be *our* end. But—oh, hell! Let's get started, before we lose our nerve altogether."

Ahmid drew the lantern up, and they proceeded to tie a stout, continuous rope from one to the other. Then Ahmid started cautiously down the steps, dangling a lantern below him as he descended. Allison followed, Ghent bringing up the rear. Their supplies they had tied securely on their shoulders.

Down, down they crept, pausing now and again to stare hopefully yet fearfully into the mysterious depths below, where Ahmid's legend and dream had visioned another and lost world. The smooth walls formed a space perhaps a dozen feet square. The same precision that had made the Great Pyramid a marvel of geometrical dimensions and craftsmanship also characterized this shaft. But, unlike the exterior of the pyramids and the Sphinx, which had been ravaged by the elements, these shielded walls were as perfect as the day they had been constructed. Had the shaft been cut with a steel die, its sides and corners could not have appeared more regular. No mortar had been used between the stones; yet the thinnest of knife blades could not have been inserted between them anywhere.

"What a riot Mr. Pharaoh would have been at building wells these days," remarked Allison, facetiously.

"Or mausoleums," suggested Ghent.

"Couldn't you think up a more cheerfull assignment for him?" said Allison. "Say, a caisson—or even a football stadium?"

But conversation soon languished in that tomb-like enclosure. They descended in silence for many minutes. Allison was intently maintaining his count of the number of steps or rungs covered: nineteen hundred and forty-two so far. He estimated that they were about eighteen inches apart—the length of the cubit of ancient times. On this basis they were already more than twenty-five hundred feet below the subterranean chamber, or about a half-mile deep—and still no bottom was in sight! If they ever reached bottom, he could consult the improved-type altimeter he carried in his pack, and check these calculations.

Now the rungs were becoming damp, slippery. There was a murmur of seeping water, gaining volume with the accumulation over the smooth walls below. As the adventurers descended farther, the first thin sheet of water grew steadily heavier, racing downward with increasing swiftness.

"We can't go much farther," said Ghent. "Ahmid, what did that confounded delirium of yours—your dream—tell you about this water?"

"It tell that passage lead to lost oceans, also many strange sights—and to much gold."

"Oceans and gold, eh? Did it, perchance, tell you how the devil we are going to swim through this particular 'ocean' to bring back this gold?"

"This may be only a local spring, Hugh," soothed Allison. "Anyway, let's continue as long as we can, now that we've come this far."

Privately he admitted that it would

take small urging to turn him back. But Ghent agreed, while the eccentric Ahmid appeared insensible to any danger. It seemed reasonable, however, that they should be able to descend, in reasonable safety, steps that the ancient Egyptians had found it possible to build.

At an estimated level of fifty-five hundred feet they caught at last a gleam of bottom far below. The racing layer of water about them now was a good half-inch deep—which does not sound formidable, though racing over one's clinging hands in an icy shower, it was no light handicap.

"There's your ocean, Ahmid," shouted Ghent. "If you don't get rinsed down into it, you might try a Steve Brodie into it. Only, first untie that rope!"

"We might as well have a closer look —try to find out why the Egyptians thought it worth while building this secret shaft to wherever it goes," Allison yelled back.

Once again he prevailed upon his companions to go farther.

Now they were less than fifty feet above the gleaming surface below. A mile and more below the desert's floor! Small wonder that they had not heard the splash of the dropped lantern the day they had discovered this shaft.

The frigid black water beat hungrily upon their faces and bodies as it cascaded down the corrugations of the narrow stairway. Was that beckoning surface below worth the hazard of reaching it? What could they hope to find out if, indeed, they succeeded in descending to it?

These deliberations were rudely discarded as a startled cry escaped Ahmid. Allison felt the jerk of the life-rope even as he glimpsed the little brown man clutching desperately at the slimy rungs. The next instant they were all hurtling toward the darkly glinting sheet that Allison felt sure was waiting to engulf them.

3. Grotto of the Slugs

A STRANGE, sickly odor assailed Allison's nostrils as his mind groped back to consciousness. He recalled falling and his fresh consternation when his outstretched hands had stabbed into a gelatinous mass just beneath that blackly glistening surface of water at the bottom of the shaft.

Then his fingers had abruptly probed a firmer substance, a blubber-like layer underneath which he could feel a living organism — an immense and repulsive body whose yielding sheath gave off an offensive, glue-like odor. The mass under him had heaved suddenly, flinging him back into the air. Followed the second drop, which had ended in a jolting crash and oblivion.

The blackness about him, now, was absolute. Only a sound of falling water linked him with a world of reality. He sat up painfully. His head throbbed bewilderingly as he felt for the flashlight he carried in one pocket for emergencies. To his infinite relief, the light not only still was there but was unsmashed. There was a tense moment as he manipulated the exasperatingly flimsy switch with which the manufacturer had always and persistently equipped these lights. For once, it worked at first attempt.

The beam of light leapt through the black veil, lighting a jagged wall less than five feet away. Fearfully he swung it about, where he should find Ghent and Ahmid if the life-rope was intact. Then he saw the former sprawled but a yard away, with Ahmid just beyond on an uneven, rock-strewn floor. Even as he reached out to touch Ghent, the big fellow stirred and groaned.

Once more Allison was successful in a search. This time a dented but other-

wise undamaged flask was his reward. With the aid of its potent contents he presently brought Ghent around. Ahmid had meantime recovered without assistance, apparently none the worse for his share in the terrific jolt with which the three had been cast upon the grotto floor, presumably by some monster in the pool at the bottom of the shaft.

"What a charming place we've dropped into," observed Ghent shortly, staring round at the semicircle of dripping walls that was broken by a single narrow opening opposite the pool. He seemed, fortunately, to have suffered principally from having the wind knocked out of him.

" 'Flung' into, you mean," corrected Allison, pointing as a grayish mass bulged up suddenly from the black pool which lapped at their feet. A great, slimy head rose at one end of the mass, only to disappear swiftly as the tail thwacked upon the surface with a loud report. Allison had a fleeting recollection of a pair of protuberances on the thing's unsightly head, not unlike those on a common garden snail's head. A single convulsion of such a creature's body would be sufficient to flip a dozen men aside with stunning force. Whether it was a giant amphibian snail, or some weird cross between slug and seal, he could not guess; but of its dangerous strength there had been ample demonstration.

Across the agitated water they could see the narrow ladder of steps leading back to their own world and safety—only a few feet distant, but as inaccessible as if miles away. As they looked, a pair of wetly gleaming heads like the first reared themselves from out of the depths, writhed about briefly and were gone.

"Ugh!" shivered Ghent. "What grisly monsters!"

"Let's take stock and see what's left of our paraphernalia," suggested Allison. "I see Ahmid still has the acetylene lantern he had tied to him when we started down. And our food-and-equipment packs all seem secure and dry, thanks to their waterproof coverings. I don't believe we're any the worse for our mishap after all."

"What a Pollyanna *you* turned out to be," observed Ghent. "I suppose you're about to suggest that we go on and look for more trouble now."

"Might as well. That pool and its denizens don't look inviting, and I'd as soon postpone tackling it by pressing on instead, since we've survived thus far."

This they finally agreed upon. The stolid Ahmid led the way with the relit lantern.

Down the middle of the grotto a small stream ran, disappearing into the opening previously observed. This carried the overflow from the black pool at their backs. They entered the passage cautiously, continuing with increased confidence as they found their progress unimpeded except for jagged projections from walls and roof. Now and again, however, they had to straddle the stream's trickle in the narrow passage. Huge boulders also barred their way at times. Over these they were obliged to clamber, sometimes with scarcely body room between their slippery tops and the dripping roof.

It was while astride of the subterranean stream that Allison saw a splashing trail just ahead. It ended abruptly in a small pool on one side. Stooping swiftly, he tossed out on to the rocks a curiously shaped fish some four inches long. It proved to be without eyes, long feelers taking their place. This was not surprizing, since without ever a glimmer of daylight, these creatures had no need of sight. Though the slugs of the pool may have inherited eyes, they were in all probability sightless, too.

The adventurers had traversed perhaps a third of a mile of the tortuous way when the murmur of falling water again reached their ears. This grew steadily louder as they progressed along the now-widening passage. Presently Ahmid halted, pointing mutely ahead.

4. *Into the Limbus of Sheol*

EVEN the faint illumination of rugged, wet walls and roof was startlingly absent as they gazed incredulously before them. It was as if a black curtain had been let down a few paces away. The subterranean brook ended suddenly in that great void, as if severed with a magic simitar.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Ghent. "The jump-off to Hades!"

Indeed, it seemed that they had reached the literal end of the world. But for a swishing of the lost brook somewhere below, they might have been standing on the brink of oblivion. What was the extent of this vast space, and what lay beyond its mysterious veil? Was this, perhaps, the threshold of Sheol, a region of boundless space underneath the globe's skin, and empty save for the departed spirits of those who once had lived above? These were questions never to be answered other than by conjecture.

Abruptly they missed Ahmid. They became conscious of the lantern burning brightly where he had set it down. It stood to one side and near the end of the disappearing ledge. But of its late possessor they saw not a trace. Had he been swallowed up in that great void? And why had they heard no outcry?

"Ahmid, you sun-baked son of a camel," bawled Ghent, "where are you?"

Only the echoes behind them answered. Allison took a step toward the lantern to pick it up.

"God!" he gasped, halting suddenly. "Look!"

He pointed toward a shadowy patch close against the wall a few feet away, where the lantern's glare had until now prevented their noticing it. A sound like the popping of a bird-seed in a canary's bill, greatly amplified, was heard. Before their horrified gaze a swaying object took form in the uncertain light—a sight to chill the marrow of the stoutest-hearted.

Perched in a shallow cleft midway between roof and floor, a tangled mass of jointed, spindly legs radiated from a globular black body. Over the whole a narrow and apparently sightless, billed head moved from side to side, while now and again one of the creature's legs would stretch forth tentatively, as if in search of another victim—for the unfortunate Ahmid lay huddled under that ghastly form! It must have struck him speechless at its first, poisonous touch.

Half insect, half bird, it crouched there. At any instant it might pounce upon them as it had upon the Arab, for the sound of their voices evidently had aroused it. It seemed to be trying to locate them by turning its evil head from side to side. Sightless, it probably depended largely upon its hearing for finding and darting out after its victims—whether fish or human it did not seem to discriminate. Ahmid, however, it may have discovered through his unconsciously brushing against one of its legs in passing.

Softly, Allison drew his automatic, and took careful aim at the hideous head. A dreadful, shuddering screech drowned the echoes of the report. The bundle of legs writhed convulsively. Back, back, the grotesque head twisted, until it was doubled under the thing's evil body. Suddenly the whole slipped from its niche in the wall. It rolled directly toward Allison and Ghent like a great grisly ball!

But the creature was in its death

throes. As they leapt aside, it dropped into the water, where it lay quivering.

Allison rushed at once to Ahmid's quiet form.

"Too late," he pronounced a moment later. "The poor fellow's head has been crushed like a seed by that monster."

"Let's get out of this accursed place," cried Ghent. "I've had enough!"

Allison raised the lantern and looked around carefully.

"It terrifies me—and draws me, too," he said slowly. "Hugh, we've risked a lot to get here; I'd like to chance it a little farther, if you're willing."

"Farther! Why—do you think we're birds, that we can leap out there into space? Be yourself, Trent, old fellow! Let's get started for the outside before it's too late."

For answer Allison pointed across the passage, toward something his keen eyes had just discovered: a square slab imbedded in the rock floor, a heavy iron ring marking its center.

"There is where others may have gone on," he said.

Curiosity aroused, Ghent hurried with Allison to the slab. Together they tugged at the ring, not without mingled hesitation, and a certain eagerness as well. The same thoughts were running through both their minds. Did this square of stone cover some fresh horror? Or, perhaps, a fabulous treasure; or a passage that would lead them to further recesses of this strange world?

At last the heavy slab yielded to their efforts. They tilted it against the wall, disclosing a well-preserved stairway winding down into the shadows.

Allison looked at Ghent across the aperture, speculatively.

"Are you game?" he challenged.

The other returned his level gaze in silence for a bit. Then:

"I'm game—and crazy, too, like you. We'll do it."

"Good. But first we'll put poor Ahmid away as decently as these rocks will permit."

A half-hour later they started down the spiral stairway, which was cut out of solid rock. Ahmid's store of unperishable provisions they cached in the wall, against their possible return, for they already had as much as they could carry.

To their surprize, the stairs shortly led out upon the open face of a cliff, beyond which a thin sheet of water cascaded from above.

"The lost brook," pronounced Allison.

"It's lucky for us that the face of this cliff is undercut," said Ghent. "We don't have to take a ducking, as we did while coming down that shaft."

The steps, here, were spiral no longer, but were built in a series of long jogs back and forth across the face of the cliff by means of ingenious borings deeper into the rock at the turns. These jogs carried them beyond the ribbon of the falling water, first to one side and then the other. At such times they stared out again into that vast, mystifying emptiness. Like the abyss of limbo it yawned at their elbows, now on their right, now on their left, as they clung to the wall along the narrow steps. These were less than twenty-four inches wide!

FLIGHT after flight they descended, until it seemed that the ancient builders had meant to carry on to the very bowels of the earth. Yet they had descended, in fact, not much farther than in the original shaft. And presently Allison glimpsed bottom once more.

When at last they stood upon a level floor of rock at the foot of the last long flight, they were eleven thousand, six hundred-odd feet below sea level, according to the altimeter.

The water from the subterranean brook

still fell before them. Curiously enough, it did not strike bottom even here. For, a dozen yards away yawned a large chasm, and into this the water dropped without interruption in its long fall! Were they practically as far as ever from their objective, a definite bottom where they might expect to explore another and living world? Allison began to wish a little that Ghent had prevailed upon him to try to turn back when they recovered consciousness in the grotto of the slugs. He thought of a certain soft-eyed girl whose hair in that precious sunshine of the outer world was like spun gold, and wondered whether he should ever look upon it again. How long after they were reported missing would she wait for him as she had said she would?

At this juncture occurred the strangest and perhaps most unnerving of all their experiences since they had entered the pyramid. Softly, at first imperceptibly, the floor began to sink with them!

For a second or so they remained rigid with amazement. The very smoothness of their descent disarmed them, here, more than two miles within the earth's crust. Too late they saw four walls of rock rising round them, the square opening above already several feet higher than their heads. Instinctively they leaped for the receding edge, but the weight of their packs made their efforts futile.

"Well," said Ghent breathlessly, "this is once there is no argument about whether or not we shall go on! Do you suppose all these passages were chiseled out for a ghastly joke on curious fools like us—with this trap as the *coup de grace?*"

"I don't think so," Allison replied, nervously but with some conviction nevertheless. "They wouldn't have gone to so much trouble merely to satisfy a whim. No. There is some far more vital purpose behind all this remarkable construction, and we're bound now toward its solution. At any rate, we can do nothing but wait until this amazing, ancient elevator reaches the end of the line."

"I'll say they knew their rocks, anyway," admitted Ghent. "This contraption rides like a Venetian gondola. Hydraulic, probably. You've got to hand it to Pharaoh's gang for their advanced engineering skill. What a people!" In his wonder he nearly forgot his fears.

The top of the lengthening shaft was lost in the shadows. Two stone grooves, one in each side wall, dwindled in the distance above like a pair of railroad tracks.

At the end of a little over a quarter of an hour, during which the altimeter registered an added drop of nearly nine thousand feet, the slab came to rest with a soft jar. The last few feet had been in the open, between two massive guides of rock.

All about them here was water, except for a miniature island, in the center of which the elevator platform now rested. Overhead, the pierced rock roof hung low, with the falling water once more visible, striking at last upon natural bottom at the edge of the islet. Just beyond the falls was the smooth face of a towering cliff. This, evidently, formed the farther side of the aperture they had observed just before their unexpected slide downward.

But strangest of all was a curious iridescence in the tranquil body of water which stretched away to a natural horizon on their left—toward the west, according to their compass; a softly beautiful, saffron radiance that was like liquid sunlight, glowing palely. The underground sea—for such it was—apparently supplied the light that illuminated this amazing underworld, much as our sky illuminates the upper world at twilight. How different from the black emptiness of that vast cavern into whose limitless space they

had gazed before beginning their descent from the passage of the brook!

In the distance several sizable islands were visible, and on these a low, bluish vegetation showed. The roof over this enchanting world was lost in the faint, golden haze that hung over all.

"Well, what do you say now about the 'trap'?" asked Allison.

"Astounding!" breathed Ghent. "But wait. What's that!"

The blunt nose of a large, barge-like affair with many oars was emerging from behind the nearest of the islands. In it were figures resembling human beings. They were gesticulating excitedly. Plainly they had discovered their visitors. The vessel turned and made for the islet, oars flashing swiftly in the yellow light.

5. The Sahara Sea

SPELLBOUND, they watched the strange vessel draw rapidly nearer. Besides the oarsmen, for which twenty-two oars could be counted, there were at least fifty more men on the decks fore and aft. A single magenta standard fluttered at the prow.

The keel grated on the beach. Stocky, pale-visaged and bareheaded men clambered over the sides, hairless and wide-eyed. In stature they averaged perhaps three inches shorter than our own race. It did not occur to Allison to fear them, since they neither displayed weapons nor appeared in the least belligerent. Rather, he was too busy examining them, as, plainly, they too were examining him and Ghent, with great curiosity.

A particularly sturdy individual in simple garb not unlike an abbreviated toga came near, while his companions waited a few yards behind.

Allison had opportunity now to note a peculiar, bluish pallor of these men's skin, their over-large eyes, and the complete and somewhat disconcerting absence of lashes and eyebrows.

With a sweep of his hand, the leader indicated a desire that they board his galley. His mien was pleasant, hospitable.

Allison turned to Ghent.

"We may as well," he suggested.

"Right. We came here to find out things, and it looks as if this is the best way, choice or no choice."

Something like a chorus of pleased approval sounded among the little men as Allison nodded acceptance of the invitation and prepared to follow them. As he climbed aboard after Ghent with the aid of anxiously helpful hands, he looked back toward the center of the islet. There he saw the platform of the lift just disappearing upward. Perhaps it automatically released itself when relieved of extra weight. Or it may have been manipulated by these men. However, there would be ample time to learn these and other things among this mysterious and interesting people.

Inside the vessel, which, they noted with surprize, was molded from a sort of dark cement, the matter of weapons was cleared up; for long and murderous-looking spears were stacked in every corner. Yet the very fact that these had been left behind when the owners landed, reassured the pair. Of mast or sail there was no sign, another detail they were to understand in due time.

They were escorted to the raised rear deck, where the leader and his several companions pressed them to recline in comfort with them on luxurious couches composed of seaweed with cloth spread over it. About them rich drapes of many hues abounded. Strange fruits were brought them to taste, along with delicacies of fish and the eggs of fish.

The vessel was under way now, swaying forward regularly to the thrusts of the long oars manned by bulging-muscled

men below in the waist. These evidently were prisoners of a sort, for they were closely watched by two men who stalked back and forth between the two rows of straining bodies. With the exception of the oarsmen, all the subterraneans wore polished ornaments of hammered metal that looked like copper. Obvious pride was evinced in these trinkets by the wearers.

At a sign from the leader, whom the others addressed as Thar, an obsequious individual came forward, armed with a slate slab and a fragment of shell. With these he proceeded to sketch, with considerable dexterity, a series of amazing pictures. These resembled the hieroglyphics that we know from the ancient Egyptians; with the difference that the scribe exerted himself to make his meaning clearer through elaboration and a crude manner of diagramming things, supplemented also by many signs and gestures. At intervals he would pause to converse with Thar in a soft, musical tongue.

Soon Allison and Ghent understood that they, as welcome and long-hoped-for guests from the outer world, were being conveyed to a place of many men on a large island ruled over by a great king. A course between several islands was drawn.

These islands presently took form in the mists and passed astern, one after the other, just as sketched. It was through this method of communication that they were to learn, later, the real secret of the pyramids, and of the origin of this strange race.

Overhead, the glow from the iridescent sea was reflected in the yellow haze which formed an unbroken, opalescent sky. How far above them the invisible roof of this vast cavern was, they could but conjecture. But the altimeter told them that they had descended nearly twenty-one thousand feet. The ceiling of the subterranean world might easily be a couple of miles above the sea they now sailed. Allison wondered whether or not storms ever visited its now tranquil surface. There were many things he intended to find out at the first opportunity. How large was this sea?—the sea he and Ghent had dubbed the Sahara; for, apparently, it extended beneath the great arid wastes of the Sahara plateau, though it had been from another and higher layer of water that present-day scientists had taken blind fish after drilling in that desert. How thickly populated was this opalescent world? And did this odd radiance spring from billions of minute organisms, as he suspected, or was it artificially made and controlled by this queer people? Did they, like our surface races, war among themselves in the strange, murderous frenzy of "civilization"? The abundance of spears indicated that they might—or was it merely banditry that they were prepared to defend themselves against?

As he ruminated on these things, a body of land far larger than any previously sighted hove into view, rising so high out of the sea as to lose itself in the saffron haze above. As they drew nearer, Allison regarded, wonderingly, the sheer gray cliffs. How they could land there, he failed to imagine. Yet the vessel drove straight toward those towering walls without so much as slackening its speed!

Just when it seemed that they must be dashed to destruction on the jagged rocks, a cleft appeared among the numerous vertical seams in the gray palisade. A moment later they shot into a narrow channel between walls so sheerly tall as to seem momentarily in danger of toppling over upon them. This passage widened rapidly. A wide turn brought them abruptly into a large bay.

Here all about them rose the same grim, gray walls, though these were less steep

than those outside. A reef fringed their bases, here and there a beach lying between. On these flat areas were expanses of curious, squat buildings. Hundreds of vessels of various sizes, ranging from a scow to twice the size of their own, plied the waters of this subterranean harbor.

At a word from Thar, the vessel was nosed in to shore, where they presently drew up alongside of a cement quay. Cement, they were to learn, was virtually the sole building material of this world.

No sooner had Allison and Ghent stepped ashore than a crowd of subterraneans began to gather about, the amazement at the sight of these strange visitors spreading like wildfire. Almost at once they found themselves unable to proceed farther. Only by dint of alternate plunging and threatening by the spear-wielders from the vessel were they able to push at last into one of the narrow streets above the quay. Along this thoroughfare they made their way with less difficulty, between rows of single-story houses with narrow, unbarred slots for windows. Evidently it was thought that openings so small needed no guarding, for they were too narrow to afford ingress of a human being. Doors, seemingly, were confined to somewhere in the rear.

With their progress, however, the houses grew more pretentious, even somewhat ornamental, though still of the one-story type. Finally they arrived before a blank wall of considerable extent and height, in the center of which a great iron gate was guarded by several men with spears. At a password from Thar, this gate was swung inward by the gaping guards, and Allison and Ghent followed into a large court.

A functionary received Thar just inside. The two spoke briefly, excitedly. Then the former hurriedly left. Presently he reappeared and beckoned to Thar, who promptly led his guests into the larger of several buildings that stood within the court. As they entered the arched doorway, Allison saw a man in bright-hued toga rising from a divan to meet them.

6. *A Crater Metropolis*

For years afterward, Allison could recall his meeting of Asan, emperor of the city of Neophal and all Subterranea, as vividly as if but of the day before. For, despite the anemic color of his blue-skinned race and his small though muscular stature, his fitness to rule was manifest at a glance. Yet his reception of them was as cordial and natural as was possible on the part of one who could not speak their tongue.

After a time that was taken up largely by the interested questioning of Thar by Asan, Allison and Ghent were assigned one of the rooms that opened off the labyrinth of corridors beyond the room they had first entered. Each room had for its ceiling a covering of fish skins, sewn together. Being transparent, these allowed some of the iridescent glow to filter through. They were the only roofs used in Subterranea, where, it was learned, it never rained or stormed. Neither did it grow noticeably colder or warmer, the temperature remaining at right around 68 degrees Fahrenheit always. In short, the subterraneans had no "weather." This explained the absence of masts on their vessels.

As for the origin of their light, Allison's earlier guess about the minute organisms in the sea supplying the glow was correct, this glow being reflected and diffused everywhere by the humid haze.

Sea-food, well cooked, was brought to the weary adventurers, and strange but not unpleasing fruits. For drink, a rather tasteless milky fluid was served by the two

servants assigned to them, one of whom was their erstwhile interpreter and scribe of the voyage, called Boab. The drink, they learned later, was obtained from a plant similar to our milkweed, this constituting the beverage of the entire kingdom, since "fresh" water was virtually limited to the slug-polluted fall beside which they had descended on the last leg of their journey.

Every courtesy was shown them. They were escorted all about with no visible attempt to hinder their going where they pleased. In time they learned their way about the city and harbor. The busy populace eyed them with vast curiosity, but never interfered with them; for Asan had issued stringent orders to this effect.

The subterraneans lived largely by fishing, the sea supplying the bulk of their food; for, other than a coarse, mealy plant from which a sort of bread was ground and dried, the soil yielded small sustenance besides the fruits. There was some commerce with the people of the other smaller islands, where the soil better favored fruit-raising and the growth of various grasses from which the finest to the coarsest fabrics were woven. Dyes were made from sundry poisonous berries with which the realm abounded, and certain earths.

From distant regions meager quantities of copper were brought for making prized ornaments and jewelry. Allison and Ghent were astonished to learn that gold was considered a base and useless metal because of its softness and abundance in the rock walls about Neophal. Here, then, was the wealth, strangely spurned, that Ahmid had spoken of. Copper, and copper-and-iron coins, constituted the money of the realm.

Iron ore was everywhere. From it the subterraneans skilfully fashioned spears, tools and certain machinery. The automatic hydraulic lift, by which the adventurers had arrived on the islet, was one of the remarkable mechanical achievements; though, so far, it had not been learned why this device was never used to communicate with the outer world.

Spears—Allison wondered why these were made at all, for neither he nor Ghent had seen any disturbance whatever among these peaceful people since their arrival several weeks past. Yet there was a strange hint of dread all around them that Allison sensed more and more as time went on. It was as if the subterraneans all silently feared some catastrophe that had visited them before. Was it an eruption of the volcano in whose vast, extinct crater the subterranean metropolis of more than 400,000 souls nestled? Or some scourge that periodically descended upon the face of this strange world?

Both Allison and Ghent were fast picking up the tongue of their hosts. The use of hieroglyphics for communication with their two servants was daily becoming less needful—"daily" because the subterranean did have a measure of night and day: the ebb and flood of the tide. Though less pronounced in the limited sea of this region, the tides were perceptible, dividing subterranean time into periods of a little over six hours. Two of these periods made up their working day, the other two their time for rest and sleep.

Oddly enough, these people were seldom visited by sickness. Their span of life was somewhat in excess of our own. The women, who were rarely seen outside their houses in Neophal, lived solely for their husbands and offspring. Like the men, they were without hair, the lack of sunlight probably accounting for the general hairlessness. The race was religious, in its way, worshipping the sea as their god.

As for their origin, it seemed fairly certain that they were from the ancient

Egyptians. In time Allison and Ghent were informed of the subterranean legend which had it that, ages ago, the ruler over a powerful surface race had sentenced his usurping brother and followers of the latter to eternal existence in an underworld known, by scientists even of that time, to exist. The pyramids, so the legend went, were monuments erected to mark forever the place where the usurpers were "buried"—with the Sphinx probably added as a final, sardonic gesture. The legend failed to account for the king's and queen's chambers in the Great Pyramid. It was not improbable, however, that these chambers were shrines at which the reigning monarchs meditated upon the welfare of their banished kin.

The present populace of Subterranea, then, must be the descendants of those banished Egyptians. Their color and large eyes might logically be accounted for by the conditions under which they had existed for centuries. Even had they believed they would be permitted now to return to the outer world, they were no longer fitted to live in the rarer atmosphere and the bright sunlight there. Thus they stayed on, ignoring the ingenious elevator and passage linking them with another and strange world.

Only in the sea was life in this world shared with the subterraneans, apparently. On the land of their realm there were neither animals nor insects.

How far the subterranean sea extended, it was difficult to learn. The subterraneans seemed, like the ancient Spaniards, to fear the regions that lay beyond the limits of their own shores. To the east they would go, where was the unused outlet to the surface world. But in other directions they would not venture farther than the last of several other known islands, particularly to the west.

Pressing Boab for information about this, Allison, with Ghent, was at last taken before Asan.

"My guests," said the ruler, "I am told you wish to learn certain things about the forbidden region that lies beyond our country."

"Yes, sire. In return, my companion and I gladly offer our services toward helping solve or overcome any menace of that region."

Asan was silent for a time.

"Once, long ago," he began presently, "a fleet carrying the pick of our most fearless men journeyed into that region—to the very edge of the Sea of Darkness, beyond the island Pahlno. Like all those who had ventured there before them, they never returned.

"Now, it is related by our people of the distant isles how hordes of terrible creatures have appeared from the darkness and fallen upon fishermen, only to disappear quickly with their victims. No one can tell exactly what these fiends look like, so suddenly do they appear and slip back into the shadows of their realm.

"It was to halt these depredations and punish these foul creatures that my galleys and my bravest men ventured at last to seek them out."

The emperor paused to sigh heavily.

"The only trace ever found of that fateful expedition was the vessels, deserted and spattered with blood. I do not wish to make more widows among our people through further futile expeditions. Hence I have forbidden my people even to talk of these things. Fortunately, the creatures of the dark do not trouble us often," he finished resignedly.

"Sounds like a lot of hooey to keep us away from something—maybe a ton of Egyptian jewels or——" muttered Ghent at Allison's elbow.

"I'm not so sure," said Allison, aside; then to Asan: "Sire, we would like greatly to visit Pahlno. Perhaps, with our

knowledge of science, we will discover something that may lead to permanent relief from this danger."

Once more Asan fell into somber thought. Finally: "I grant, with misgivings, your generous request. But perhaps, as you say, your knowledge will help; also your strange weapon with which you have made our people tremble when you showed us how it could roar forth the fire that we must make with much labor over dry weed and sharp rocks. I will send with you my most experienced mariner, Thar. Many times he, too, has asked me to let him take a galley into that fateful region. He may explore the sea immediately about Pahlno—but not beyond the Finger of Darkness. May the god of the sea, Juigeh, send you back to me safely!"

Could they have foreseen what was in store for them, or known that this was the last time they should look upon this kindly ruler, it is doubtful if they would have set forth for the realm of the mysterious marauders.

7. *The Stygian Horde*

THE steady sweep of long oars was speeding the galley beyond the outermost regions of the kingdom of Subterranea. Five *ghira* behind them—about three miles—already dissolving in the haze, lay Pahlno, eighty *ghira* from the crater metropolis Neophal.

Beside Allison on the rear deck Thar stood grimly watching the sea slip past. Ghent was prowling around somewhere forward.

"Think you we shall see these creatures?" inquired Allison.

The sturdy captain looked grave.

"I have a presentiment of evil happenings," he said. "See, the waters are darkening. Even now we are passing under the great Finger of Darkness, beyond which I have been forbidden to venture. Yet I can not resist, this time, the urge to learn the fate of the others who ventured on these waters, never to return."

Allison looked up just in time to see the jagged tip of a great pillar of black rock penetrating the lower mists from above. Too dark to be a stalactite, it was probably a finger of rock reaching down from the curving roof of this world. Even as he stared after this geological freak, he thought he caught a glimpse of a perpendicular, dark wall meeting the water off to the starboard. Perhaps this was the northern limit of Subterranea; or it might be but a rocky peninsula jutting out from the mainland far away; or another island.

He wondered if the floor of the sea here originally had been that of a sea much shallower than the iridescent waters behind. The blue mud of the latter, sometimes dredged up by fishermen, with its abundant lime content, indicated that it had, centuries ago, been submerged many thousands of feet deep instead of being always its present comparatively shallow depth. Whatever the cataclysm that had formed this vast underworld, it was evident that the floor over which they now were gliding was of a character very different from that of the eastern region. Possibly this part had been the inshore, and therefore shallower, section of a steep slope that dropped away to vast depths of another sea before it all had buckled upward to form this world. Hence the absence here of those luminous billions of organisms characteristic of great depths, which are also characterized by the same deep layer of mud like that found about Neophal and the sections lying around it.

The sea had grown so dark by now that only the distant yellow glow in the east enabled them to see at all. The oarsmen, who, unlike the crews usually com-

prised by convicts serving out sentences at the oars, were all free and picked warriors, were rowing cautiously. The galley moved sluggishly, as if sharing the reluctance of its passengers to advance farther.

A faint wailing somewhere behind, from the direction of the island Pahlno, was wafted to Allison's ears. He glanced at Thar, who seemed, however, to have heard nothing. But Allison knew that the hearing of the subterraneans, strangely, was not acute, although in the dense atmosphere of this world sound traveled far. Still, he reflected, he might have been mistaken about the sound, himself. Wrought nerves, plus imagination, play weird tricks with one at times.

Suddenly, from out of the swirling mists on their left, a dark bulk loomed.

Too late the blue men saw their danger. Before they could fend off the other craft, a shadowy horde poured over the side. In a trice the waist of the galley was a mass of struggling bodies.

Allison saw Ghent leap out of the mêlée and run for the steps to the rear deck to join Thar and himself. A slate-hued horror dropped the mangled carcass of a blue man to pursue. With great leaps, it reduced the distance between itself and its intended victim. A scaly, pointed tail about two feet long curved about its gangling legs, while a head that was half a rat's, half a man's, grimaced horribly above a misshapen torso covered with the short-haired hide of a rodent. More than eight feet tall, it reached forth a long, skinny arm to grasp Ghent.

The bullet Allison dispatched found its mark in the nick of time. A moment later Ghent stood beside them, firing into the dark horde advancing upon them in terrible silence. Here and there a great, naked form faltered, but the rest came on steadily. The timely shot that had saved Ghent had only temporarily delayed the reckoning for them all.

The automatic in Allison's hand snapped futilely. He was reloading it despairingly when his arms were pinned in a vise-like grip. The foul odor of the thing that held him filled him with nausea. A great, fuzzy hand was clapped over his face. His senses reeled as he struggled vainly. Then he felt himself picked up, being borne down the steps.

He could see others of the creatures bearing Ghent and Thar and other blue men. A sudden lurch through the air, followed by a light jar—and Allison realized that his own captor had leaped with him to the deck of the other vessel below, a clumsy, raft-like affair in the center of which stood a high-walled enclosure like a stockade. Into this he was pushed with the others. A heavy door closed upon them.

"Looks like our finish," remarked Ghent dully. "We're like children in the hands of these monsters."

"I wonder whether they are men or—just animals," groaned Allison. "They emit only rare squeals among themselves, but those might pass for words. The fact that they were able to construct this float, crude as it is, convinces me that they *are* thinking beings."

"Something between a rat and an ape—ugh! what disgusting things they are!" spat Ghent. "But, whatever they are, this explains the fate of the others and the finding of their empty vessels. I saw them carrying off the dead as well as the living. We might guess why!"

A creaking sound interrupted him. Their captors were at the massive sweeps Allison had noticed. The way the sharpened prow lifted and lurched forward attested to their captors' great strength.

"At solving mysteries, we certainly do take the prize," continued Ghent. "However, I don't think we'll live to tell about

this one—which may be just as well, for no one would believe it, anyway. That reminds me; we're leaving without that gold Asan so obligingly collected for us. Oh, well."

8. *The Flaming City*

TO ALLISON, the hours spent on the floor of the floating prison seemed endless. Actually, the time was less than six hours, during which it grew steadily darker. At intervals, he discussed with Ghent and Thar various schemes for escape, but without arrival at any hopeful plan. For the present, at least, they were quite helpless. Both Allison's and Ghent's weapons had been taken from them—further proof that these creatures could reason like men.

For a time, the construction of the craft on which they were prisoners puzzled Allison, for it had seemed to him as they were borne across the low deck, that the entire affair was made of large reeds something like bamboo. Probably the region of darkness was without even the stunted fruit trees of Asan's realm, from which to construct vessels. And, lacking the skill of the blue men with cement, these creatures must fall back upon whatever their land afforded. The result was scarcely more than a raft with a sharpened prow. Even now the water could be seen racing between the thick mat of reeds underneath. But how did they contrive to keep a mass of mere reeds from becoming water-logged and from sinking, much less to navigate such a craft?

Then he saw, with the aid of a match from a metal box their captors had overlooked, that the end of each reed was carefully sealed with some plastic substance. Thus was buoyancy maintained. Bound in bundles with ropes of twisted vines, enough of these sealed tubes would float a considerable cargo, but the effort of propelling such an unwieldy mass must be terrific. Yet the rat-men—he could think of no other term approximating the giant horrors that held them captive—seemed more than equal to the task. The great raft lifted and lurched forward with each powerful swing of the sweeps until it seemed that it would be wrenched apart. What chance had they against such creatures?

At last there came a lull in that maddening, steady creaking. The lift and surge of the craft subsided to more deliberate strokes. There was much scurrying about outside the stockade, to an accompaniment of those nerve-racking squeals which were so incongruous with the size of the monsters that emitted them. Came a great swishing of water as the sweeps were reversed suddenly, a grating over the bottom, followed by a jolting stop. They had arrived somewhere at last.

During the last hour, a faint, reddish glow had become noticeable, growing steadily brighter. It flickered eerily now on the walls so that they were able to see about them vaguely.

Presently the door was opened. Two rat-men entered and herded them out like so many cattle, between rows of others of the foul things, standing in silent, close-packed formation. Allison could almost feel their gloating, tawny eyes upon him.

Outside the tall stockade walls, a weird and awe-inspiring sight awaited them. Over the rock-strewn waste that lay beyond the sea's edge, a reddish, sickly light pulsated. This light, Allison saw, then, came from the top of a rocky cone, seemingly about a mile and a half inshore. It was like, yet unlike, a volcano. For one thing, it did not seem to be in eruption, despite its fiery peak, the usual muttering of explosions being entirely absent. No lava or rocks shot upward from its maw. The ruddy flame that licked its edges,

rising in great, gusty rolls, looked more like belchings of a huge gas burner—as, in effect, they were. This vast gas well was the remains of what may have been a genuine volcano at one time. Now, however, it was become a vent for the escape of gas that remained. It supplied the light for this grotesque world. Doubtless it was this beacon by which the rat-men had steered their clumsy craft through the darkness.

By gestures and pushing, the creatures conveyed their wish that the prisoners swing ashore over a rope stretched from the prow to a natural knob of rock, beyond which a ring of the revolting things waited ominously. The ease with which their erstwhile jailers ran along this rope after them more than ever suggested rodents. A blue man dropped off into the water. Like a vulture, one of the creatures pounced upon and dragged him on to the rocky bank.

There was an awful significance to Allison about the fact that the dead which their captors had brought aboard from the galley were no longer in evidence about the deck. That these foul creatures had devoured them, he did not doubt. Thus was explained the inevitable disappearance of the blue men from every fateful vessel that had been found adrift in the region of darkness.

Hemmed in by hundreds of the rat-men, the band of captives began their march inland toward the monster torch. This proved farther away than Allison had estimated. They had traversed all of four miles, part of this distance being over marshy ground where grew reeds like those used in the raft, before they approached the base of the mountain.

Here a strange panorama was presented. Bank after bank of hardened volcanic mud lay in step formation, a mile or so deep, all about the immense gas pyre. In the upright faces of these banks were thousands of holes, each about four feet in diameter.

Out of these holes, at their approach, swarmed a multitude of the creatures, some small, some large and full-grown like their captors. For a brief space, it seemed that their time had come, for the horde pressed forward eagerly, rapaciously. Only the prompt herding of the captives into one of the openings closely saved them for the time being.

Outside, the dreadful creatures danced about, squeaking in frenzied abandon, while several stood guard at the opening, silent and apparently unmoved. The demonstration outside sent needles of ice through Allison's veins—the cries of the pack, rejoicing at the nearness, the helplessness of their prey!

After a time, however, they dispersed. Utterly weary, Allison dropped off into merciful slumber.

9. *The Chamber of Sacrifices*

THE days that followed were hideous ones for the band of captives beside the flaming mountain. Their number had been temporarily augmented by a second craft, which had brought women and children as well as more men. They came from the island of Pablno. This solved the mystery of the distant wailing Allison had heard across the water just before their own capture. For the first time in the history of the underworld, the creatures of the darkness had made a concerted attack upon the blue men, actually venturing into the light and upon their land.

With the arrival of the others, the entire band was moved to a larger chamber—or burrow, as it may be more appropriately called, for it was naught but a vast hole, widened by the claws of these half-human beasts until it resembled a huge igloo inside.

For food, they were brought fragments of strange, raw meat, and, to the joy of Allison and Ghent, fresh water to drink. Evidently there was a stream or spring somewhere in this country. The water, which was set upon the ground in a large bowl of baked mud, was at first refused by Thar and the rest, who thought it was sea-water. Later, they, too, drank of it. At the meat, however, they all balked, until, sadly famished, Allison and Ghent managed to cook some of it over a small fire made with pieces of rushes and reeds that formed their bedding. Ill-tasting as it proved, the meat kept them alive, for it was their only food.

Daily, rat-men other than those who guarded them came and tore away members of the prison colony. From a crevice in the top of their prison, Allison could see the unfortunate ones herded up a trail along the side of the mountain, finally disappearing somewhere among the many fissures there. Whether the rat-men knew of the existence of this crevice, caused by the drying out of the thick, mud roof, the prisoners did not know. It was possible that they did, but were disdainful of the strength of their captives to widen it through several feet of well-hardened mud without the aid of claws like their own.

By turns, Allison and Ghent, assisted by Thar, worked with the edge of the metal match-box to cut through that sheath, while the others managed to hide their labors from the guards. The work was pitifully slow, and they knew not whether they would be any better off if they did succeed in cutting through to the outside; but it gave them something to do and kept them from going mad. When they were not working at the crevice, they plugged it with wet mud.

One thing gave them hope. This was the fact that when they had been moved to the larger prison, they were led away from the more thickly populated section. Perhaps here they might hope to escape the observation of the denizens of the "city," once they got out, unobserved by the guards. It was a forlorn chance, but, being the only one, better than none.

At last the crevice had been widened to an outlet of some twelve inches. It was at this stage an observing youth among the prisoners came near to upsetting their plans. While Allison, Ghent and Thar were not watching, he took out the mud plug and wriggled through the opening.

They had not missed him when he crept back, hours later. And thus it was they learned of the sacrifices that soon would be the fate of them all if they remained there.

"I was seen after I had gone a little way," the youth wept to Thar. He had really slipped out to follow his mother, who had just been taken away with some others. "They made me walk with the rest. But they did not know that I had escaped—they thought I was trying to come *back*.

"Far up the mountain side, they led us, O, *essanai*, till our feet were bleeding from the sharp rocks. At last we reached a cavern, into which the air rushed with a great roar. So swift was its passage that even the—the Things must cling to the side to stand upright. The rest of us could but crawl upon our hands and knees.

"Finally we reached a circular chamber, in the center of which was a great chasm, and out of this a column of fire shot up and disappeared through a large hole in the roof. The Things dragged our people toward the fiery chasm, one after the other, and cast them out into the fire, while one of their number stood near the edge, leaping and waving his dreadful arms about strangely, and leading the others in a shrill chant. They would

throw several out, then dance and leap more wildly than ever with their leader for a while, then begin again.

"Some of those thrown into the fire would catch at another ledge below and drag themselves back up to the precipice where stood the leader. Instead of pushing back those who managed to climb this far in spite of their burns, he would help them out. Whereupon, one of the waiting Things would dart forward and seize him—and after that, O, *essanai,* they would—would——"

From the faltering youth, Thar elicited, with difficulty, a harrowing account of cannibalism, based on some crazed notions these creatures had about the return to them of certain of their sacrifices by their god, the fiery devil of the mountain. This could not, however, account for the source of the mysterious meat diet on which the entire population, including their guards, seemed to subsist. A dreadful suspicion came to Allison. Could it be that these fiends feasted upon one another; on their weaker members perhaps—and that *this* was what he and the rest of the captives had been living upon? The thought left him faint with nausea. He scarcely heard the youth as he continued:

"Then happened that which enabled me to escape. One of our men began to fight so hard just as he reached the edge of the chasm that one of the Things almost slipped off with him. The one who had been leading the others in the chanting ceased waving his arms to go to the other's assistance. In the struggle for balance on the rough edge of the chasm, all three disappeared!

"At this all the Things began to squeal horribly. Several ran to the chasm's edge. In the excitement, I found myself suddenly free and unwatched. I ran back the way we had come, as fast as I could, until at last I reached here. You won't let them take me again, O, *essanai,* will you?"

The galley captain turned to Allison and Ghent.

"My friends, what can we say to this lad? Must we wait here until these monsters carry us all away to their sacrifices?"

"I have a plan," said Allison, presently. "The crevice now is almost large enough for all to escape, but the alarm would be spread at once by the two guards that remain outside. Suppose we send this brave youth forth for several stones which may be used for weapons inside. By that time we will have widened the opening so that Ghent and I can slip outside and attack the guards. At the same time your men will attack them from the inside. It is a long chance, despite our numbers, for their strength is tremendous, but it is our only opportunity."

Upon this plan they agreed.

FOUR trips the intrepid youth made, without being discovered. Meanwhile, Allison and Ghent worked desperately at the opening. At last they found that they could squeeze through. Leaving the collected stones for the others whom Thar had selected for their size and strength, to use in their concentrated attack, Allison and Ghent succeeded in wriggling through to the outside, where they, too, were successful in picking up a sizable stone for each hand a short distance away in the flickering shadows, without detection.

With thudding hearts, they slipped back toward their erstwhile prison and the formidable pair on guard. Their cause seemed a forlorn one, for, unless they were exceedingly lucky in casting the first stone apiece at the rat-men, they must depend upon a hand-to-hand encounter and the uncertain quality of a stone held, hammer-fashion, in one hand to pound their adversaries into submission—certainly a doubtful proposition at

best, once the giant rat-men had closed upon them. Still, it was not impossible that the blue men might succeed in turning the tide of battle in time.

Separating, they crept round opposite sides of the prison burrow, having the good fortune to appear simultaneously before the unsuspecting guards, one of which was actually lying down.

With what coolness he could command, Allison aimed his precious missile for the revolting head. As in a slow-motion picture, he remembered afterward the surprize in those blazing eyes, the curious appearance of the peaked ears at the side of the head as the owner struggled clumsily to get to its feet. He saw, afraid to believe his eyes, the stone strike, with a resounding impact, just forward of one of those fuzzy ears, and the creature go suddenly limp.

The next instant he was grappling with the other rat-man, who was in the act of bending the powerful Ghent backward over one skinny knee, like a reed. Again and again, Allison struck that awful body with the stone he still held, without finding a vital spot. The blue men were over and about the guard, hammering, holding, biting frenziedly. With one sweep of an arm, the rat-man scraped most of them off, and clutched Allison about the throat with a paralyzing grip. Everything went black before his eyes.

But in doing this, the rat-man had released Ghent. The blue men, too, were back like so many demons. Just when Allison thought all was over with him, the long, scaly fingers at his throat relaxed their grip. A few moments later he opened his eyes to see Ghent bending over the dreadful Thing to make sure it was dead, while the blue men swarmed murderously over the other one.

The struggle had been a brief one, after all. The surprized rat-men had scarcely uttered a sound, and none of their kind had yet appeared to assist them.

Without the loss of an instant, the youth was started for the sacrificial cavern, Allison and all the rest following close on his heels. Their luck still held. Without meeting any further resistance, they shortly found themselves stumbling over the rough floor of the cavern, with the rushing intake of air tugging at their bodies. Allison and Ghent, by reason of their size, swung the two "clubs" which the surprized guards had not found time to wield in that sudden, fierce struggle. These were in reality more like slings, each consisting of a stone ingeniously woven in a net of vines with a long twist of the latter for a handle.

They did not need the licking light to tell them that they were nearing their goal. The shrieking of the blue women, mingled with moans and squeaking chants, rose and fell in a horrible cadence. Allison paused briefly at the turn that would bring them into the great chamber, restraining and putting behind him their youthful guide.

"Now, at them with everything we've got!" he yelled, darting out into the open.

The rat-men met them, snarling and squealing terrifyingly. There were eight of them. Although the attackers and intended victims, together, outnumbered them four to one, only the desperation of that band gave it a chance against those monsters. The blue men fought like beings possessed, with nail and rock, teeth and knees. Allison and Ghent, swinging their clubs like madmen, felled three of their harried assailants and bowled a fourth over the fiery precipice. Then Allison was flung against the wall so forcibly that his brain skipped a space.

When he staggered to his feet once more, the maddened blue folk had all but overwhelmed the remainder of the enemy with the help of Ghent, who seemed to

be everywhere at once. It was as if he bore a charmed life, slipping from the fatal grasp of those long arms again and again by inches. Even Thar was emulating him with the aid of a captured club. Allison was just in time for the finish. The two rat-men that still stood up under that wild band's assault were sent quickly to join their fellows in the flaming depths.

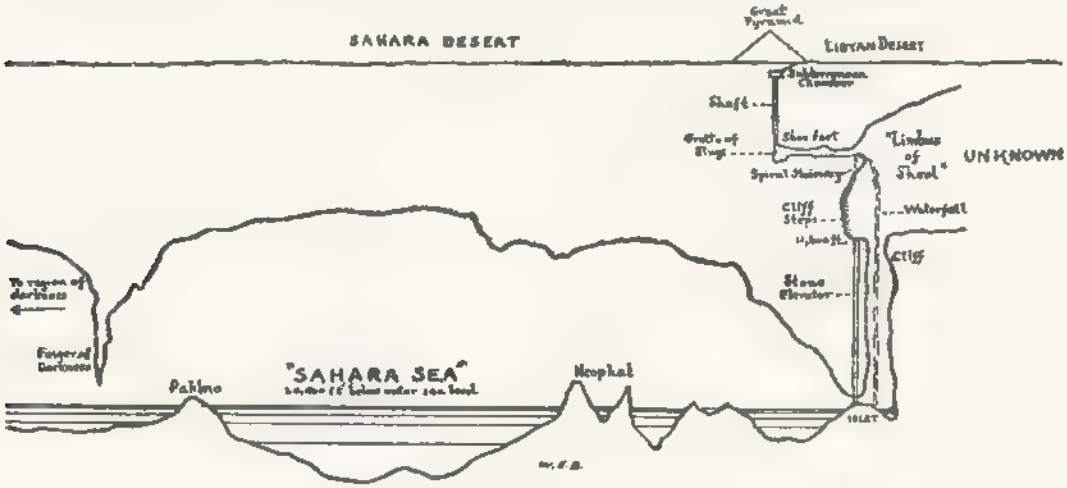
As the victors stood panting and watching the flames shoot up into the great natural flue, Allison understood the reason why they were able to withstand the heat generated. They were standing in the passage farther back. It was no feat to keep one's footing in this place.

It was while briefly examining and analyzing these features that Allison, pausing there near Ghent and Thar, discovered the curious physical phenomenon that was to play so big a part in their salvation—and to result in the death of one of the three.

10. *When the Earth Exploded*

THE phenomenon that had caused Allison's eye was a second opening to the chamber, close beside that through which they had come, but partly hidden by a point of rock. It was visible only what was evidently a vast, natural gas mixing-chamber. Through the cavern from the outside of the mountain, which lighted the rat-men's realm, was sucked the air with its oxygen content to fan that bluish flame below into full radiance. However, the rushing in of the cool air, and the rapid movement of the heat upward, kept the chamber from becoming unbearably hot—though it was far from comfortable.

Also, here where the suction had a chance to widen out, it tugged less at their bodies than it had in the narrowness of



from the outer edge of the precipice, where he now stood.

Out of this opening came a continuous, bluish stream of gas. This blended at once into the roaring column of fire in the center.

"A feeder," Allison muttered.

"What?" shouted Ghent above the din, noting the movement of his lips.

For answer, Allison drew Ghent beside him and pointed to the newly discovered opening. There was but a few feet of rock between it and the first one.

"Looks like one of the natural gas passages to this inferno," he shouted. "If we had a way of following that back and finding an opening into it somewhere

from the other passage, what a Fourth-of-July bang we might set off!"

"But why?"

Allison looked serious. "Have you considered how we're going to get out of this damnable country? We've succeeded only in killing a couple of guards and a few fire-worshipping priests. There remains a city full of rat-men surrounding the base of this side of the mountain."

"All right, I'll bite. What's the answer?"

"I wish I knew. Still—if we were charged by a multitude and could find a way to touch off a square mile or so of their unprepossessing terrain, we might do more than *bluff* our way out of this dreadful realm."

"Of course we wouldn't feel this little upheaval ourselves"—ironically.

Allison smiled wanly.

"I guess I hadn't thought about that. There was one place on our way where I thought I smelled gas. If we could find an opening there, and if——"

"Too many 'ifs'," objected Ghent.

"Well, anyway, we may as well be leading the way out of here," said Allison. "Slim as our chances will be outside, there's no percentage in remaining bottled up inside this big fire engine until the rest of those fiends call for us."

With the remainder of the blue band at their heels, they started back, planless and glum. They had traversed about two-thirds of the way out when Allison detected the odor of gas again. Curious, he halted and called Ghent's attention to it. Together they felt about briefly until Allison discovered a hole that went through the wall on their left—toward the other passage.

Through this opening he stretched an arm as far as he could reach. There was a stout suction about his hand as it penetrated to where, undoubtedly, a stream of gas or a mixture of gas and air raced by, since the smell of it grew stronger as his hand evidently diverted a quantity of it into their own passage.

"Now, if we just had about a mile and a half of fuse," said Allison, dryly.

"And here's a few useless yards of it," said Ghent, jerking a small roll out of an inside pocket of his jacket. "The devils missed it, but they might as well have had it, for all the good it is to us now. We'd be blown to smithereens if we succeeded in setting off that gas with this scrap."

He flung it down at Thar's feet.

The latter was keenly interested in the reason for their deliberations. They paused long enough to explain to him, then resumed their way quickly. The mouth of the cavern was reached through the darkness without their encountering any other rat-men. But as they hesitated in search of a way round the monsters' city below, consternation suddenly overwhelmed them. A veritable army of rat-men was advancing along the slope to their right. The dead guards had been discovered.

"Now, if we only had that earthquake all rigged up to shoot!" mourned Ghent. "Well, let's get going from these parts. Round the mountain to the other side, quick!"

Running and leaping over jagged rocks, madly scrambling down precipitous cliffs, they fled in futile effort to outdistance that awful pack. Yet they had a sufficient lead at the start to enable them to reach a smooth swale at the base, where better footing prevailed. Quicker progress was now possible. Further, soft ground with patches of reeds growing on it stretched ahead. Perhaps they could lose the heavier pursuers behind them across this. Allison could hear Ghent breathing strenuously behind him, and the shuffle of the blue men following. He

looked back for the first time since their precipitate flight.

Yes, there were the rat-men, not far this side of the cavern's mouth, which could be seen from their vantage-point beyond the base of the mountain. But where was Thar? Allison had thought the galley captain right behind Ghent.

But further conjectures were rudely shattered. He felt a tremor run through the earth, simultaneous with a queer jar in the air. Then a terrific clap of thunder seemed to burst directly overhead. As in a dream, he saw half the mountain heave outward, carrying the dark horde with it!

"Thar—he's done it!" he heard Ghent gasp even as a hurricane swept them to the ground.

Somehow, neither knowing nor caring whether they were injured, Allison and Ghent got to their feet and ran from the avalanche of rock and mud, the remnant of blue men scattering behind them.

Across the treacherous, quaking ground they raced, unmindful of quicksand or bog. To put as much distance as possible between them and the crumbling mountain was the one idea in their minds then.

Allison had a fleeting impression of the cone, far up in the black sky, buckling like a dynamited stack. Debris and flame belched from the peak and caving walls. Then a second and deeper explosion rocked the world around him.

11. Through the Rock Sky

For minutes the ground swayed to the accompaniment of a rain of rocks, Allison reeling drunkenly with it. He saw Ghent struggling dazedly to his feet close by. Here and there the still bodies of blue men lay. A few wandered about aimlessly in the distance.

Of the rat-men there was no trace. A mile-long sheet of flame rolled up from a chasm that had ripped open the ground from the middle of the mountain to far back into the plain across which the captives had approached the city of burrows. The city itself was covered by the toppled wall of the mountain. Such was the havoc wrought by the hand of Thar, who had sacrificed himself that his people might have a fighting chance! The few yards of discarded fuse had proved more than enough for his purpose, after listening to Allison's theory about igniting the subterranean gas stream. It was a miracle that both Allison and Ghent had escaped death in the now-subsiding rain of rock that had practically annihilated the blue men.

"God!" cried Allison. "Let's get out of this inferno before it's too late."

"Out? How—where?"

"There, perhaps." He pointed beyond and above the exploded mountain.

Following his outstretched arm, Ghent saw, high up and all but lost in the distance, a curious thread of white, strangely distinct despite its evident remoteness. His heart bounded with sudden hope. Could it be——

"Daylight!" he cried suddenly, almost hysterically. "Allison, old pal, do you suppose that's what it is?"

"We can find out," replied Allison. "Let's hike. That is"—anxiously—"if you're O. K."

"I'm all right, but—well, I guess there's no hope that Thar escaped the hell he stayed to touch off, and it looks like the few blue men that survived have decided on beating it back toward their own land."

Hugging what remained of the southern shoulder of the mountain, they plodded on toward that rift far up in the southwestern sky. On the other side of the mountain they found an uninhabited, desolate valley, the floor of which sloped sharply upward ahead. The sides of this

valley curved up into the pulsing dusk and were lost from sight.

On and on they plodded, the trough of the rugged valley growing steadily steeper. The old beacon remained discouragingly of the same size, as if they were drawing no nearer to it. To their anxious eyes, it even seemed to have receded after an hour of arduous climbing.

Hours later, when at last it appeared that they had reduced the distance between them and that strange bright line ahead and far above them, it faded slowly until it no longer was visible. Their disappointment, however, was more than offset by the removal of any doubt now that the vanished thread of light actually was daylight filtering through a rift somewhere above. Weary and hungry, but with hopeful hearts, they dropped on the dry ground to fall into dreamless sleep.

When Allison woke, the rift was visible once more. He shook Ghent awake, and a few minutes later they were again on their way. All that day they struggled upward, the way becoming ever more difficult. Great rocks and yawning fissures alternately barred their path, forcing them to seek roundabout routes to pass these. Their feet and hands were raw from continual contact with sharp ledges, their bodies weak with hunger. Only the swelling size of that white line ahead kept them going. When finally it grew dim, they fell in their tracks, to toss in uneasy slumber the night through.

Late afternoon of the following day found them nearing their goal with the desperation of drowning men, and the courage that is given to only a few. The thread of white had grown to a bold but crooked rift. As they paused to rest and gaze at it with questionable hope, a wedge of light penetrated the blackness beneath. The phenomenon was unmistakable. It was a ray of sunshine breaking through a fissure in the roof of this weird world, like a rainbow of promised release.

They felt new life well up within them at the sight. Drawing recklessly on their reserve strength in that wave of exultation, they climbed feverishly for a time. At last, exhausted, they threw themselves down again, scarcely able to bear the pain of their tortured limbs. Their own world was less than half a mile away. But would they be able to reach it even now? Far, far behind them they could see the shattered gas crater, its ghastly glare lost here in the faint illumination from the rift above. Allison thought that great torch, shrunken now by distance, looked like a miniature Vesuvius.

Then the changing angle of the sun caused the welcome ray of sunshine to withdraw. Gradually, then, the jagged white opening grew dimmer, until at last it had vanished once more. They were forced to rest until daybreak before proceeding farther.

Their plight now was desperate. Without food, all but spent from hunger and over-exertion, they were not even sure they could negotiate the remainder of the trail from their subterranean prison. Nor could they know whether or not they should find civilization—if, indeed, the opening ahead proved large enough for them to crawl through; for even a small chink can be seen a long way in a dark interior. They fell asleep, finally, to lie in a sort of stupor until dawn.

Morning, however, found both Allison and Ghent resolved to win through in spite of all odds. This determination was rewarded by the finding of a spring not long after their start. They were refreshed greatly by this first drink since leaving their burrow prison. Unfortunately, they had no means of carrying any of the precious fluid with them. And they might well expect to find only a burning desert waste outside.

They rested a while beside the spring, soaking up its life-giving moisture against the probable drought before them. It was here they made a find that was probably the means of their finally escaping with their lives. They captured several snails, which they devoured, though their sole acquaintance with such fare, cooked or otherwise, had consisted of a recollection of reading somewhere that snails were relished by certain human beings as a delicacy. They proved anything but delicacies, however.

Once more they pressed on. The slope here on each side gave way to rugged, encroaching walls that steadily narrowed the little valley. The rift was close now, but the going was becoming more nearly impossible every minute. Great fragments of rock, evidently jarred loose from above, blocked their way. They were obliged to climb over piles of these, the sharp edges tearing their already bleeding hands cruelly.

At last the break was almost overhead. It was then that they saw a precipitous wall blocking their way. Upon nearing it, they were relieved to observe that it offered numerous footholds. They hesitated only long enough to choose a likely route to the top.

About fifty feet up they came to a ledge. Along this they crept cautiously to where they could see the daylight gleaming whitely through a long fissure in the roof close above them.

An immense, loose pyramid of rock below this opening enabled them to climb precariously to within about ten feet of it. If this pile should slip and sink but a few feet, they might never escape, despite their maddening nearness to the outlet!

Ghent elected to boost Allison up. By inches, he raised him as smoothly as one big man can raise another almost as big while in a famished condition, lest a sudden lurch should send them both sprawling to the foot of that pile with several tons of rock after them.

"I've got it, Hugh," came a welcome hail from Allison, as, barely able to reach the edges of the opening, he grasped them and drew himself up painfully. There was just enough space to get through.

The problem of pulling Ghent up was not so simple, for they no longer had their rope. However, this was solved by lowering the legs of his trousers and pulling these back with Ghent clutching their ends. At last they both stood over the fissure that had been their beacon in the great expanse of subterranean sky. Its newly broken edges suggested a recent upheaval. Remembering the terrific force of that first explosion, which had split the flaming mountain in two, Allison could easily understand how this break might have been formed in an already weak section of the earth's crust, such as the expanding volume of air would naturally seek—something like the blowing out of a "stopper" at the end of the long, bottle-like valley they had followed.

"Poor old Thar!" he said, sadly. "He alone is responsible for our escape."

"True," agreed Ghent. "But I wonder if we're any better off." He pointed significantly.

They had climbed out of the fissure into a litter of big boulders. It was between two of these that Ghent was pointing. Stepping beside him, Allison gazed out upon an unbroken waste of sand. A hot hand seemed to touch his neck. The morning sun was progressing in its murderous march zenithward.

Two days later an expedition led by Dr. Torrence La Costa, returning from across the Hoggar Plateau on an unsuccessful search for the "Lost City" of the desert, said to be somewhere north of

Lake Chad, was startled by two wild-eyed apparitions staggering into his camp. Their babbling of a mysterious, subterranean world he put down as the wanderings of deranged minds.

From dwindling stores La Costa nourished and doctored the pair, the while traveling as rapidly back toward civilization as their condition permitted of being carried in the litters.

In time, Allison and Ghent recovered sufficiently to tell a coherent story to their incredulous rescuer. When at last they had convinced him that they actually had visited a subterranean world filled with a race of industrious, thinking beings, any turning back to find and chart the outlet was out of the question.

12. Lost Worlds

FOUR months later, following an unsuccessful expedition to rediscover the "back door" to Subterranea, Allison and Ghent sought to guide La Costa and a party of other scientists to the more accessible, though possibly more hazardous, entrance via the shaft underneath the Great Pyramid.

Here, again, they were to meet with disappointment.

Part-way down that dank opening, they were halted by a cave-in. Perhaps these walls, which were centuries old, had given away at last in some tremor of the earth—a slight earthquake, or even a faint jar radiating from the force behind that devasting explosion far back in the rat-men's country, deep under the earth's surface. It may have been that the walls of the long shaft actually were on the point of collapsing when the adventurers had first descended. At any rate, the shaft was effectively blocked with tons upon tons of rock blocks.

The region of the "Lost City" of the desert and Lake Chad saw other expeditions in renewed search for the other entrance to the equally lost underworld. All returned—except one, the last, which has not been heard of since it started out. In it were the intrepid Allison and Ghent, become inveterate adventurers after all. Whether they were the victims of the mysterious, hostile natives of some of the buried desert cities previously encountered by scientists in the region, or had found and penetrated the realm of surviving rat-men with fatal result, probably never will be known. Or they may have been lost in an attempt to explore the "Limbus of Sheol"—that region of the unknown beyond the end of the passage at the waterfall where the unfortunate Ahmid had been destroyed.

The Sphinx continues to watch inscrutably over the secrets of Subterranea and the Sahara Sea, including the fate of its discoverers and the access to a vast surplus of gold, which seems safe enough for the present.

"A fear which we had never experienced even in dreams deprived us of the faculty of speech."

THE TALE OF SATAMPRA ZEIROS

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A goose-flesh story of the horror that was consummated in the dark temple of the god Tsathoggua

I, SATAMPRA ZEIROS of Uzuldaroum, shall write with my left hand, since I have no longer any other, the tale of everything that befell Tirouv Ompallios and myself in the shrine of the god Tsathoggua, which lies neglected by the worship of man in the jungle-taken suburbs of Commoriom, that long-deserted capital of the Hyperborean rulers. I shall write it with the violet juice of the suvana-palm, which turns to a blood-red rubric with the passage of years, on a strong vellum that is made from the skin of the mastodon, as a warning to all good thieves and adventurers who may hear some lying legend of the lost treasures of Commoriom and be tempted thereby.

Now Tirouv Ompallios was my lifelong friend and my trustworthy companion in all such enterprises as require deft fingers and a habit of mind both agile and adroit. I can say without flattering myself, or Tirouv Ompallios either, that we carried to an incomparable success more than one undertaking from which fellow-craftsmen of a much wider renown than ourselves might well have recoiled in dismay. To be more explicit, I refer to the theft of the jewels of Queen Cunambria, which were kept in a room where two-score venomous reptiles wandered at will; and the breaking of the adamantine box of Acromi, in which were all the medallions of an early dynasty of Hyperborean kings. It is true that these medallions were difficult and perilous to dispose of, and that we sold them at a dire sacrifice to the captain of a barbarian vessel from remote Lemuria: but nevertheless, the breaking of that box was a glorious feat, for it had to be done in absolute silence on account of the proximity of a dozen guards who were all armed with tridents. We made use of a rare and mordant acid. . . . But I must not linger too long and too garrulously by the way, however great the temptation to ramble on amid heroic memories and the high glamor of valiant or sleightful deeds.

In our occupation, as in all others, the vicissitudes of fortune are oftentimes to be reckoned with; and the goddess Chance is not always prodigal of her favors. So it was that Tirouv Ompallios and I, at the time of which I write, had found ourselves in a condition of pecuniary depletion, which, though temporary, was nevertheless extreme and was quite inconvenient and annoying, coming as it did on the heel of more prosperous days, of more profitable midnights. People had become accursedly chary of their jewels and other valuables, windows and doors were double-barred, new and perplexing locks were in use, guards had grown more vigilant or less somnolent—in short, all the natural difficulties of our profession had multiplied themselves. At one time we were reduced to the stealing of more bulky and less precious merchandise than that in which we customarily dealt; and even this had its dangers. Even now, it humiliates me to remember the night when we were nearly caught with a sack of red yams; and I mention all this that I may not seem in anywise vain-glorious.

One evening, in an alley of the more humble quarter of Uzuldaroum, we stopped to count our available resources, and found that we had between us exactly three pazoors — enough to buy a large bottle of pomegranate wine or two loaves of bread. We debated the problem of expenditure.

"The bread," contended Tirouv Ompallios, "will nurture our bodies, will lend a new and more expeditious force to our spent limbs, our toil-worn fingers."

"The pomegranate wine," said I, "will ennoble our thoughts, will inspire and illuminate our minds, and perchance will reveal to us a mode of escape from our difficulties."

Tirouv Ompallios yielded without undue argument to my superior reasoning, and we sought the doors of an adjacent tavern. The wine was not of the best, in regard to flavor, but the quantity and strength were all that could be desired. We sat in the crowded tavern and sipped it at leisure, till all the fire of the bright red liquor had transferred itself to our brains. The darkness and dubiety of our future ways became illumined as by the light of rosy cressets, and the harsh aspect of the world was marvelously softened. Anon, there came to me an inspiration.

"Tirouv Ompallios," I said, "is there any reason why you and I, who are brave

men and nowise subject to the fears and superstitions of the multitude, should not avail ourselves of the kingly treasures of Commoriom? A day's journey from this tiresome town, a pleasant sojourn in the country, an afternoon or forenoon of archeological research — and who knows what we should find?"

"You speak wisely and valiantly, my dear friend," rejoined Tirouv Ompallios. "Indeed, there is no reason why we should not replenish our deflated finances at the expense of a few dead kings or gods."

Now Commoriom, as all the world knows, was deserted many hundred years ago because of the prophecy of the white sybil of Polarion, who foretold an undescribed and abominable doom for all mortal beings who should dare to tarry within its environs. Some say that this doom was a pestilence that would have come from the northern waste by the paths of the jungle-tribes; others, that it was a form of madness: at any rate, no one, neither king nor priest nor merchant nor laborer nor thief, remained in Commoriom to abide its arrival, but all departed in a single migration to found at the distance of a day's journey the new capital, Uzuldaroum. And strange tales are told, of horrors and terrors not to be faced or overcome by man, that haunt forevermore the mausoleums and shrines and palaces of Commoriom. And still it stands, a luster of marble, a magnificence of granite, all a-throng with spires and cupolas and obelisks that the mighty trees of the jungle have not yet overtowered, in a fertile inland valley of Hyperborea. And men say that in its unbroken vaults there lies entire and undespoiled as of yore the rich treasure of olden monarchs; that the high-built tombs retain the gems and electrum that were buried with their mummies; that the fanes have still their golden altar-vessels and furnishings, the idols their precious stones in ear and mouth and nostrils and navel.

I THINK we should have set out that very night, if we had only had the encouragement and inspiration of a second bottle of pomegranate wine. As it was, we decided to start at early dawn: the fact that we had no funds for our journey was of small moment, for unless our former dexterity had altogether failed us, we could levy a modicum of involuntary tribute from the guileless folk of the countryside. In the meanwhile, we repaired to our lodgings, where the landlord met us with a grudging welcome and a most ungracious demand for his money. But the golden promise of the morrow had armed us against all such trivial annoyances, and we waved the fellow aside with a disdain that appeared to astonish if not to subdue him.

We slept late; and the sun had ascended far upon the azure acclivity of the heavens when we left the gates of Uzuldaroum and took the northern road that runs toward Commoriom. We breakfasted well on some amber melons, and a stolen fowl that we cooked in the woods, and then resumed our wayfaring. In spite of a fatigue that increased upon us toward the end of the day, our trip was a pleasurable one, and we found much to divert us in the varying landscapes through which we passed, and in their people. Some of these people, I am sure, must still remember us with regret, for we did not deny ourselves anything procurable that tempted our fancy or our appetites.

It was an agreeable country, full of farms and orchards and running waters and green, flowery woods. At last, somewhile in the course of the afternoon, we came to the ancient road, long disused and well-nigh overgrown, which runs

from the highway through the elder jungle to Commoriom.

No one saw us enter this road, and thenceforward we met no one. At a single step we passed from all human ken; and it seemed that the silence of the forest around us had lain unstirred by mortal footfall ever since the departure of the legendary king and his people so many centuries before. The trees were vaster than any we had ever seen; they were interwoven by the endless labyrinthin volumes, the eternal web-like convolutions of creepers almost as old as they themselves. The flowers were unwholesomely large, their perfumes were overpoweringly sweet or fetid, and their petals bore a lethal pallor or a sanguinary crimson. The fruits along our way were of great size, with purple and orange and russet colors, but somehow we did not dare to eat them.

The woods grew thicker and more rampant as we went on, and the roads, though paved with granite slabs, was more and more overgrown, for trees had rooted themselves in the interstices, often forcing the wide blocks apart. Though the sun had not yet neared the horizon, the shades that were cast upon us from gigantic boles and branches became ever denser, and we moved in a dark-green twilight fraught with oppressive odors of lush growth and of vegetable corruption. There were no birds nor animals, such as one would think to find in any wholesome forest; but at rare intervals a stealthy viper with pale and heavy coils glided away from our feet among the rank leaves of the roadside, or some enormous moth with baroque and evil-colored mottlings flew before us and disappeared in the dimness of the jungle. Abroad already in the half-light, huge purpureal bats with eyes like tiny rubies arose at our approach from the poisonous-looking fruits on which they feasted, and watched us with malign attention as they hovered noiselessly in the air above. And we felt, somehow, that we were being watched by other and invisible presences; and a sort of awe fell upon us, and a vague fear of the monstrous jungle; and we no longer spoke aloud, or frequently, but only in rare whispers.

Among other things, we had contrived to procure along our way a large leathern bottle full of palm-spirit. A few sips of the ardent liquor had already served to lighten more than once the tedium of our journey; and now it was to stand us in good stead. Each of us drank a liberal draft, and presently the jungle became less awesome; and we wondered why we had allowed the silence and the gloom, the watchful bats and the brooding immensity, to weigh upon our spirits even for a brief while; and I think that after a second draft we began to sing.

When twilight came, and a waxing moon shone high in the heavens after the hidden daystar had gone down, we were so imbued with the fervor of adventure that we decided to push on and reach Commoriom that very night. We supped on food that we had levied from the country-people, and the leathern bottle passed between us several times. Then, considerably fortified, and replete with hardihood and the valor of a lofty enterprise, we resumed our journeying.

Indeed, we had not much farther to go. Even as we were debating between ourselves, with an ardor that made us oblivious of our long wayfaring, what costly loot we would first choose from among all the mythical treasures of Commoriom, we saw in the moonlight the gleam of marble cupolas above the treetops, and then between the boughs and boles the wan pillars of shadowy porticoes. A few more steps, and we trod upon paven streets that ran transversely

from the hightoad we were following, into the tall, luxuriant woods on either side, where the fronds of mammoth palm-ferns overtopped the roofs of ancient houses.

We paused, and again the silence of an elder desolation claimed our lips. For the houses were white and still as sepulchers, and the deep shadows that lay around and upon them were chill and sinister and mysterious as the shadow of death. It seemed that the sun could not have shone for ages in this place—that nothing warmer than the spectral beams of the cadaverous moon had touched the marble and granite ever since that universal migration prompted by the prophecy of the white sybil of Polarion.

"I wish it were daylight," murmured Tirouv Ompallios. His low tones were oddly sibilant, were unnaturally audible in the dead stillness.

"Tirouv Ompallios," I rejoined, "I trust that you are not growing superstitious. I should be loth to think that you are succumbing to the infantile fancies of the multitude. Howbeit, let us have another drink."

We lightened the leathern bottle appreciably by the demand we now made upon its contents, and were marvelously cheered thereby—so much so, indeed, that we forthwith started to explore a left-hand avenue, which, though it had been laid out with mathematical directness, vanished at no great distance among the fronded trees. Here, somewhat apart from the other buildings, in a sort of square that the jungle had not yet wholly usurped, we found a small temple of antique architecture which gave the impression of being far older even than the adjoining edifices. It also differed from these in its material, for it was builded of a dark basaltic stone heavily encrusted with lichens that seemed of a cœval antiquity. It was square in form, and had no domes nor spires, no façade of pillars, and only a few narrow windows high above the ground. Such temples are rare in Hyperborea nowadays; but we knew it for a shrine of Tsathoggua, one of the elder gods, who receives no longer any worship from men, but before whose ashen altars, people say, the furtive and ferocious beasts of the jungle, the ape, the giant sloth and the long-toothed tiger, have sometimes been seen to make obeisance and have been heard to howl or whine their inarticulate prayers.

The temple, like the other buildings, was in a state of well-nigh perfect preservation: the only signs of decay were in the carven lintel of the door, which had crumbled and splintered away in several places. The door itself, wrought of a swarthy bronze all overgreened by time, stood slightly ajar. Knowing that there should be a jewelled idol within, not to mention the various altar-pieces of valuable metals, we felt the urge of temptation.

Surmising that strength might be required to force open the verdigris-covered door, we drank deeply and then applied ourselves to the task. Of course, the hinges were rusted; and only by dint of mighty and muscular heavings did the door at last begin to move. As we renewed our efforts, it swung slowly inward with a hideous grating and grinding that mounted to an almost vocal screech, in which we seemed to hear the tones of some unhuman entity. The black interior of the temple yawned before us, and from it there surged an odor of long-imprisoned mustiness combined with a queer and unfamiliar fetidity. To this, however, we gave little heed in the natural excitement of the moment.

With my usual foresight, I had provided myself with a piece of resinous wood earlier in the day, thinking that it might serve as a torch in case of any noc-

turnal explorations of Commoriom. I lit this torch, and we entered the shrine.

THE place was paven with immense quinquangular flags of the same material from which its walls were built. It was quite bare, except for the image of the god enthroned at the farther end, the two-tiered altar of obscenely figured metal before the image, and a large and curious-looking basin of bronze supported on three legs, which occupied the middle of the floor. Giving this basin hardly a glance, we ran forward, and I thrust my torch into the face of the idol.

I had never seen an image of Tsathoggua before, but I recognized him without difficulty from the descriptions I had heard. He was very squat and pot-bellied, his head was more like that of a monstrous toad than a deity, and his whole body was covered with an imitation of short fur, giving somehow a vague suggestion of both the bat and the sloth. His sleepy lids were half-lowered over his globular eyes; and the tip of a queer tongue issued from his fat mouth. In truth, he was not a comely or personable sort of god, and I did not wonder at the cessation of his worship, which could only have appealed to very brutal and aboriginal men at any time.

Tirouv Ompallios and I began to swear simultaneously by the names of more urbane and civilized deities, when we saw that not even the commonest of semi-precious gems was visible anywhere, either upon or within any feature or member of this execrable image. With a niggardliness beyond parallel, even the eyes had been carven from the same dull stone as the rest of the abominable thing; and mouth, nose, ears and all other orifices were unadorned. We could only wonder at the poverty or avarice of the beings who had wrought this unique bestiality.

Now that our minds were no longer enthralled by the hope of immediate riches, we became more keenly aware of our surroundings in general; and in particular we noticed the unfamiliar fetor I have spoken of previously, which had now increased uncomfortably in strength. We found that it issued from the bronze basin, which we proceeded to examine, though without any idea that the examination would be profitable or even pleasant.

The basin, I have said, was very large; indeed, it was no less than six feet in diameter by three in depth, and its brim was the height of a tall man's shoulder from the floor. The three legs that bore it were curved and massive, and terminated in the likeness of feline paws displaying their talons. When we approached and peered over the brim, we saw that the bowl was filled with a sort of viscous and semi-liquescent substance, quite opaque and of a sooty color. It was from this that the odor came—an odor which, though unsurpassably foul, was nevertheless not an odor of putrefaction, but resembled rather the smell of some vile and unclean creature of the marshes. The odor was almost beyond endurance, and we were about to turn away when we perceived a slight ebullition of the surface, as if the sooty liquid were agitated from within by some submerged animal or other entity. This ebullition increased rapidly, the center swelled as if with the action of a powerful yeast, and we watched in utter horror while an uncouth amorphous head with dull and bulging eyes arose gradually on an ever-lengthening neck, and stared us in the face with primordial malignity. Then two arms—if one could call them arms—likewise arose inch by inch, and we saw that the thing was not, as we had thought, a creature immersed in the liquid, but that the liquid itself had put forth this hideous neck and head, and

was now forming these damnable arms, that groped toward us with tentacle-like appendages in lieu of claws or hands!

A fear which we had never experienced even in dreams, of which we had found no hint in our most perilous nocturnal excursions, deprived us of the faculty of speech but not of movement. We recoiled a few paces from the bowl, and coincidentally with our steps, the horrible neck and arms continued to lengthen. Then the whole mass of the dark fluid began to rise, and far more quickly than the suvana-juice runs from my pen, it poured over the rim of the basin like a torrent of black quicksilver, taking as it reached the floor an undulant ophidian form which immediately developed more than a dozen short legs.

What unimaginable horror of protoplastic life, what loathly spawn of the primordial slime had come forth to confront us, we did not pause to consider or conjecture. The monstrosity was too awful to permit of even a brief contemplation; also, its intentions were too plainly hostile, and it gave evidence of anthropophagic inclinations, for it slithered toward us with an unbelievable speed and celerity of motion, opening as it came a toothless mouth of amazing capacity. As it gaped upon us, revealing a tongue that uncoiled like a long serpent, its jaws widened with the same extreme elasticity that accompanied all its other movements. We saw that our departure from the fane of Tsathoggua had become most imperative, and turning our backs to all the abominations of that unhallowed shrine, we crossed the sill with a single leap and ran headlong in the moonlight through the suburbs of Commoriom. We rounded every convenient corner, we doubled upon our tracks behind the palaces of time-forgotten nobles and the warehouses of unrecorded merchants, we chose preferably the places where the incursive jungle-trees were highest and thickest; and at last, on a by-road where the outlying houses were no longer visible, we paused and dared to look back.

Our lungs were intolerably strained, were ready to burst with this heroic effort, and the various fatigues of the day had told upon us all too grievously: but when we saw at our heels the black monster, following us with a serpentine and undulating ease, like a torrent that descends a long declivity, our flagging limbs were miraculously reanimated, and we plunged from the betraying light of the road into the pathless jungle, hoping to evade our pursuer in the labyrinth of boles and vines and gigantic leaves. We stumbled over roots and fallen trees, we tore our raiment and lacerated our skins on the savage brambles, we collided in the gloom with huge trunks and limber saplings that bent before us, we heard the hissing of tree-snakes that spat their venom at us from the boughs above, and the grunting or howling of unseen animals when we trod upon them in our precipitate flight. But we no longer dared to stop or look behind.

We must have continued our headlong peregrinations for hours. The moon, which had given us little light at best through the heavy leafage, fell lower and lower among the enormous-fronded palms and intricate creepers. But its final rays, when it sank, were all that saved us from a noisome marsh with mounds and hassocks of bog-concealing grass, amid whose perilous environs and along whose mephitic rim we were compelled to run without pause or hesitation or time to choose our footing, with our damnable pursuer dogging every step.

Now, when the moon had gone down, our flight became wilder and more hazardous—a veritable delirium of terror, exhaustion, confusion, and desperate diffi-

cult progression among obstacles to which we gave no longer any distinct heed or comprehension, through a night that clung to us and clogged us like an evil load, like the dragging toils of a monstrous web. It would seem that the creature behind us, with its abnormal facilities of motion and self-elongation, could have overtaken us at any time; but apparently it desired to prolong the game. And so, in a semi-eternal protraction of inconclusive horrors, the night wore on. But we never dared to stop or look back.

Far off and wan, a glimmering twilight grew among the trees—a foreomening of the hidden morn. Wearier than the dead, and longing for any repose, any security, even that of some indescribable tomb, we ran toward the light and stumbled forth from the jungle upon a paven street among buildings of granite and marble. Dimly, dully, beneath the crushing of our fatigue, we realized that we had wandered in a circle and had come back to the suburbs of Commoriom. Before us, no farther away than the toss of a javelin, was the dark temple of Tsathoggua.

Again we ventured to look back, and saw the elastic monster, whose legs had now lengthened till it towered above us, and whose maw had widened till it could have swallowed us both at a mouthful. It followed us with an effortless glide, with a surety of motion and intention too horrible, too cynical to be borne. We ran into the temple of Tsathoggua, whose door was still open just as we had left it, and closing the door behind us with a fearful immediacy, we contrived, in the superhuman strength of our desperation, to shoot one of the rusty bolts.

Now, while the chill drearness of the dawn fell down in narrow shafts through the windows high in the wall, we tried with a truly heroic resignation to compose ourselves, and waited for whatever our destiny should bring. And while we waited, the god Tsathoggua peered upon us with an even more imbecile squatness and vileness and bestiality than he had shown in the torch-light.

I think I have said that the lintel of the door had crumbled and splintered away in several places. In fact, the beginning process of ruin had made three apertures, through which the daylight now filtered, and which were large enough to have permitted the passage of small animals or sizable serpents. For some reason, our eyes were drawn to these apertures.

We had not gazed long, when the light was suddenly intercepted in all three openings, and then a black material began to pour through them, and ran down the door in a triple stream to the flagstones, where it re-united and resumed the form of the thing that had followed us.

"Farewell, Tirouv Ompallios," I cried, with such remaining breath as I could summon. Then I ran and concealed myself behind the image of Tsathoggua, which was large enough to screen me from view, but, unfortunately, was too small to serve this purpose for more than one person. Tirouv Ompallios would have preceded me, with the same laudable idea of self-preservation, but I was the quicker. And seeing that there was not room for both of us to the rearward of Tsathoggua, he returned my valediction and climbed into the great bronze basin, which alone could now afford a moment's concealment in the bareness of the fane.

Peering from behind that execrable god, whose one merit was the width of his abdomen and his haunches, I observed the actions of the monster. No sooner had Tirouv Ompallios crouched down from view in the three-legged bowl, when the nameless enormity reared itself up

like a sooty pillar and approached the basin. The head had now changed in form and position, till it was no more than a vague imprint of dissolving features on the middle of a body without arms, legs or neck. The thing loomed above the basin for an instant, gathering all its bulk in an imminent mass on a sort of tapering tail, and then like a lapsing wave it fell into the bowl upon Tirouv Ompallios. Its whole body seemed to open and form an immense mouth as it sank down from sight.

Hardly able to breathe in my horror, I waited, but no sound and no movement came from the basin—not even a groan from Tirouv Ompallios. Finally, with infinite trepidation and caution, I ventured to emerge from behind Tsathoggua, and passing the bowl on tiptoe, I managed to reach the door.

Now, in order to win my freedom, it would be necessary to draw back the bolt and open the door. And this I greatly feared to do because of the inevitable noise. I felt that it would be highly injudicious to disturb the entity in the bowl while it was digesting Tirouv Ompallios; but there seemed to be no other way if I was ever to leave that abominable fane.

Even as I shot back the bolt, a single tentacle sprang out with infernal rapidity from the basin, and, elongating itself across the whole room, it encircled my right wrist in a lethal clutch. It was unlike anything I have ever touched, it was indescribably viscid and slimy and cold, it was loathsomely soft like the foul mire of a bog, and mordantly sharp as an edged metal, with an agonizing suction and constriction that made me scream aloud as the thing tightened upon my flesh, cutting into me like a vise of knife-blades. In my struggles to free myself, I drew the door open and fell forward on the sill. A moment of awful pain, and then I became aware that I had broken away from my captor. But looking down, I saw that my hand was gone, leaving a strangely withered stump from which little blood issued. Then, gazing behind me into the shrine, I saw the tentacle recoil and shorten till it passed from view behind the rim of the basin, bearing my lost hand to join whatever now remained of Tirouv Ompallios.

THE BLACK STONE

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

The story of an unspeakable monstrosity from the Elder World that laired in the mountains of Hungary

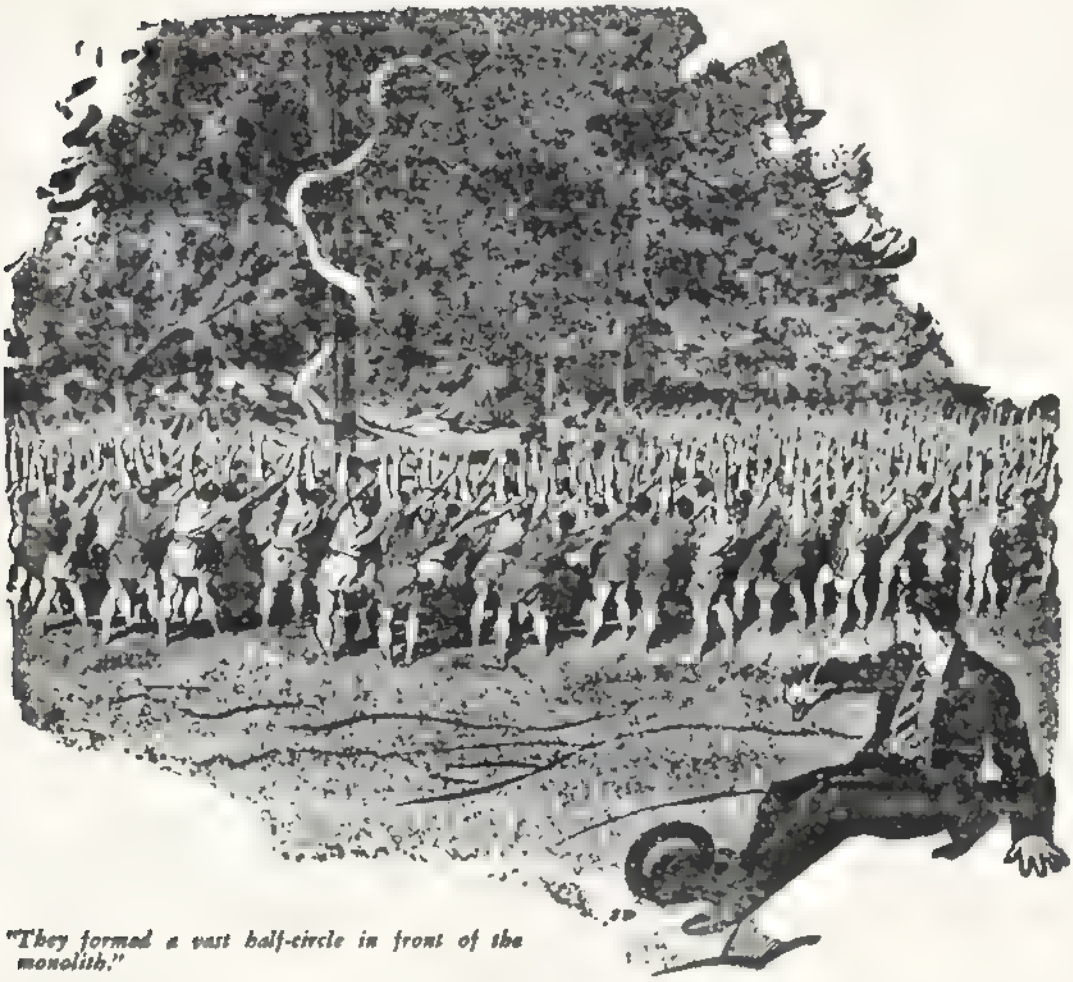
"They say foul beings of Old Times still lurk
In dark forgotten corners of the world,
And Gates still gape to loose, on certain nights,
Shapes pent in Hell."

—Justin Geoffrey

I READ of it first in the strange book of Von Junzt, the German eccentric who lived so curiously and died in such grisly and mysterious fashion. It was my fortune to have access to his *Nameless Cults* in the original edition, the so-called Black Book, published in Düsseldorf in 1839, shortly before a hounding doom overtook the author. Collectors of rare literature are familiar with *Nameless Cults* mainly through the cheap and faulty translation which was pirated in London by Bridewall in 1845, and the carefully expurgated edition put out by the Golden Goblin Press of New York in 1909. But the volume I stumbled upon was one of the unexpurgated German copies, with heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps. I doubt if there are more than half a dozen such volumes in the entire world today, for the quantity issued was not great, and when the manner of the author's demise was bruited about, many possessors of the book burned their volumes in panic.

Von Junzt spent his entire life (1795-1840) delving into forbidden subjects; he traveled in all parts of the world, gained entrance into innumerable secret societies, and read countless little-known and esoteric books and manuscripts in the original; and in the chapters of the Black Book, which range from startling clarity of exposition to murky ambiguity, there are statements and hints to freeze the blood of a thinking man. Reading what Von Junzt *dared* put in print arouses uneasy speculations as to what it was that he dared *not* tell. What dark matters, for instance, were contained in those closely written pages that formed the unpublished manuscript on which he worked unceasingly for months before his death, and which lay torn and scattered all over the floor of the locked and bolted chamber in which Von Junzt was found dead with the marks of taloned fingers on his throat? It will never be known, for the author's closest friend, the Frenchman Alexis Ladeau, after having spent a whole night piecing the fragments together and reading what was written, burnt them to ashes and cut his own throat with a razor.

But the contents of the published matter are shuddersome enough, even if one accepts the general view that they but represent the ravings of a madman. There among many strange things I found mention of the Black Stone, that curious, sinister monolith that broods among the mountains of Hungary, and about which so many dark legends cluster. Von Junzt did not devote much space to it—the bulk of his grim work concerns cults and objects of dark worship which he maintained existed in his day, and it would seem that the Black Stone represents some order or being lost and forgotten centuries ago. But he spoke of it as one of the *keys*—a phrase used many times by him, in various relations, and constituting one of the obscurities of his work. And he hinted briefly at curious sights to be seen about the monolith on midsummer's night. He mentioned Otto Dostmann's theory that this monolith was a remnant of the Hunnish invasion and had been



"They formed a vast half-circle in front of the monolith."

erected to commemorate a victory of Attila over the Goths. Von Junzt contradicted this assertion without giving any refutory facts, merely remarking that to attribute the origin of the Black Stone to the Huns was as logical as assuming that William the Conqueror reared Stonehenge.

This implication of enormous antiquity piqued my interest immensely and after some difficulty I succeeded in locating a rat-eaten and moldering copy of Dostmann's *Remnants of Lost Empires* (Berlin, 1809, "Der Drachenhaus" Press). I was disappointed to find that Dostmann referred to the Black Stone even more briefly than had Von Junzt, dismissing it with a few lines as an artifact comparatively modern in contrast with the Greco-Roman ruins of Asia Minor which were his pet theme. He admitted his inability to make out the defaced characters on the monolith but pronounced them unmistakably Mongoloid. However, little as I learned from Dostmann, he did mention the name of the village adjacent to the Black Stone—Stregoicavar—an ominous name, meaning something like Witch-Town.

A close scrutiny of guide-books and travel articles gave me no further information—Stregoicavar, not on any map that I could find, lay in a wild, little-frequented region, out of the path of casual

tourists. But I did find subject for thought in Dornly's *Magyar Folklore*. In his chapter on *Dream Myths* he mentions the Black Stone and tells of some curious superstitions regarding it—especially the belief that if any one sleeps in the vicinity of the monolith, that person will be haunted by monstrous nightmares for ever after; and he cited tales of the peasants regarding too-curious people who ventured to visit the Stone on Midsummer Night and who died raving mad because of *something* they saw there.

That was all I could gleam from Dornly, but my interest was even more intensely roused as I sensed a distinctly sinister aura about the Stone. The suggestion of dark antiquity, the recurrent hint of unnatural events on Midsummer Night, touched some slumbering instinct in my being, as one senses, rather than hears, the flowing of some dark subterraneous river in the night.

And I suddenly saw a connection between this Stone and a certain weird and fantastic poem written by the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey: *The People of the Monolith*. Inquiries led to the information that Geoffrey had indeed written that poem while traveling in Hungary, and I could not doubt that the Black Stone was the very monolith to which he referred in his strange verse. Reading his stanzas again, I felt once more the strange dim stirrings of subconscious promptings that I had noticed when first reading of the Stone.

I HAD been casting about for a place to spend a short vacation and I made up my mind. I went to Stregoicavar. A train of obsolete style carried me from Temesvar to within striking distance, at least, of my objective, and a three days' ride in a jouncing coach brought me to the little village which lay in a fertile valley high up in the fir-clad mountains. The journey itself was uneventful, but during the first day we passed the old battlefield of Schomvaal where the brave Polish-Hungarian knight, Count Boris Vladinoff, made his gallant and futile stand against the victorious hosts of Suleiman the Magnificent, when the Grand Turk swept over eastern Europe in 1526.

The driver of the coach pointed out to me a great heap of crumbling stones on a hill near by, under which, he said, the bones of the brave Count lay. I remembered a passage from Larson's *Turkish Wars:* "After the skirmish" (in which the Count with his small army had beaten back the Turkish advance-guard) "the Count was standing beneath the half-ruined walls of the old castle on the hill, giving orders as to the disposition of his forces, when an aide brought to him a small lacquered case which had been taken from the body of the famous Turkish scribe and historian, Selim Bahadur, who had fallen in the fight. The Count took therefrom a roll of parchment and began to read, but he had not read far before he turned very pale and without saying a word, replaced the parchment in the case and thrust the case into his cloak. At that very instant a hidden Turkish battery suddenly opened fire, and the balls striking the old castle, the Hungarians were horrified to see the walls crash down in ruin, completely covering the brave Count. Without a leader the gallant little army was cut to pieces, and in the war-swept years which followed, the bones of the noblemen were never recovered. Today the natives point out a huge and moldering pile of ruins near Schomvaal beneath which, they say, still rests all that the centuries have left of Count Boris Vladinoff."

I found the village of Stregoicavar a dreamy, drowsy little village that apparently belied its sinister cognomen—a forgotten black-eddy that Progress had

passed by. The quaint houses and the quainter dress and manners of the people were those of an earlier century. They were friendly, mildly curious but not inquisitive, though visitors from the outside world were extremely rare.

"Ten years ago another American came here and stayed a few days in the village," said the owner of the tavern where I had put up, "a young fellow and queer-acting — mumbled to himself — a poet, I think."

I knew he must mean Justin Goeffrey.

"Yes, he was a poet," I answered, "and he wrote a poem about a bit of scenery near this very village."

"Indeed?" mine host's interest was aroused. "Then, since all great poets are strange in their speech and actions, he must have achieved great fame, for his actions and conversations were the strangest of any man I ever knew."

"As is usual with artists," I answered, "most of his recognition has come since his death."

"He is dead, then?"

"He died screaming in a madhouse five years ago."

"Too bad, too bad," sighed mine host sympathetically. "Poor lad—he looked too long at the Black Stone."

My heart gave a leap, but I masked my keen interest and said casually: "I have heard something of this Black Stone; somewhere near this village, is it not?"

"Nearer than Christian folk wish," he responded. "Look!" He drew me to a latticed window and pointed up at the fir-clad slopes of the brooding blue mountains. "There beyond where you see the bare face of that jutting cliff stands that accursed Stone. Would that it were ground to powder and the powder flung into the Danube to be carried to the deepest ocean! Once men tried to destroy the thing, but each man who laid hammer or maul against it came to an evil end. So now the people shun it."

"What is there so evil about it?" I asked curiously.

"It is a demon-haunted thing," he answered uneasily and with the suggestion of a shudder. "In my childhood I knew a young man who came up from below and laughed at our traditions — in his foolhardiness he went to the Stone one Midsummer Night and at dawn stumbled into the village again, stricken dumb and mad. Something had shattered his brain and sealed his lips, for until the day of his death, which came soon after, he spoke only to utter terrible blasphemies or to slaver gibberish.

"My own nephew when very small was lost in the mountains and slept in the woods near the Stone, and now in his manhood he is tortured by foul dreams, so that at times he makes the night hideous with his screams and wakes with cold sweat upon him.

"But let us talk of something else, *Herr;* it is not good to dwell upon such things."

I remarked on the evident age of the tavern and he answered with pride: "The foundations are more than four hundred years old; the original house was the only one in the village which was not burned to the ground when Suleiman's devils swept through the mountains. Here, in the house that then stood on these same foundations, it is said, the scribe Selim Bahadur had his headquarters while ravaging the country hereabouts."

I learned then that the present inhabitants of Stregoicavar are not descendants of the people who dwelt there before the Turkish raid of 1526. The victorious Moslems left no living human in the village or the vicinity thereabouts when they passed over. Men, women and children they wiped out in one red holocaust of murder, leaving a vast stretch of country

silent and utterly deserted. The present people of Stregoicavar are descended from hardy settlers from the lower valleys who came into the upper levels and rebuilt the ruined village after the Turk was thrust back.

Mine host did not speak of the extermination of the original inhabitants with any great resentment and I learned that his ancestors in the lower levels had looked on the mountaineers with even more hatred and aversion than they regarded the Turks. He was rather vague regarding the causes of this feud, but said that the original inhabitants of Stregoicavar had been in the habit of making stealthy raids on the lowlands and stealing girls and children. Moreover, he said that they were not exactly of the same blood as his own people; the sturdy, original Magyar-Slavic stock had mixed and intermarried with a degraded aboriginal race until the breeds had blended, producing an unsavory amalgamation. Who these aboriginies were, he had not the slightest idea, but maintained that they were "pagans" and had dwelt in the mountains since time immemorial, before the coming of the conquering peoples.

I attached little importance to this tale; seeing in it merely a parallel to the amalgamation of Celtic tribes with Mediterranean aborigines in the Galloway hills, with the resultant mixed race which, as Picts, has such an extensive part in Scotch legendry. Time has a curiously foreshortening effect on folklore, and just as tales of the Picts became intertwined with legends of an older Mongoloid race, so that eventually the Picts were ascribed the repulsive appearance of the squat primitives, whose individuality merged, in the telling, into Pictish tales, and was forgotten; so, I felt, the supposed inhuman attributes of the first villagers of Stregoicavar could be traced to older, outworn myths with invading Huns and Mongols.

The morning after my arrival I received directions from my host, who gave them worriedly, and set out to find the Black Stone. A few hours' tramp up the fir-covered slopes brought me to the face of the rugged, solid stone cliff which jutted boldly from the mountainside. A narrow trail wound up it, and mounting this, I looked out over the peaceful valley of Stregoicavar, which seemed to drowse, guarded on either hand by the great blue mountains. No huts or any sign of human tenancy showed between the cliff whereon I stood and the village. I saw numbers of scattering farms in the valley but all lay on the other side of Stregoicavar, which itself seemed to shrink from the brooding slopes which masked the Black Stone.

The summit of the cliffs proved to be a sort of thickly wooded plateau. I made my way through the dense growth for a short distance and came into a wide glade; and in the center of the glade reared a gaunt figure of black stone.

It was octagonal in shape, some sixteen feet in height and about a foot and a half thick. It had once evidently been highly polished, but now the surface was thickly dinted as if savage efforts had been made to demolish it; but the hammers had done little more than to flake off small bits of stone and mutilate the characters which once had evidently marched in a spiraling line round and round the shaft to the top. Up to ten feet from the base these characters were almost completely blotted out, so that it was very difficult to trace their direction. Higher up they were plainer, and I managed to squirm part of the way up the shaft and scan them at close range. All were more or less defaced, but I was positive that they symbolized no language now remembered on the face of the earth. I am fairly familiar with all hieroglyphics known to researchers and philologists and I can say,

with certainty that those characters were like nothing of which I have ever read or heard. The nearest approach to them that I ever saw were some crude scratches on a gigantic and strangely symmetrical rock in a lost valley of Yucatan. I remember that when I pointed out these marks to the archeologist who was my companion, he maintained that they either represented natural weathering or the idle scratching of some Indian. To my theory that the rock was really the base of a long-vanished column, he merely laughed, calling my attention to the dimensions of it, which suggested, if it were built with any natural rules of architectural symmetry, a column a thousand feet high. But I was not convinced.

I will not say that the characters on the Black Stone were similar to those on that colossal rock in Yucatan; but one suggested the other. As to the substance of the monolith, again I was baffled. The stone of which it was composed was a dully gleaming black, whose surface, where it was not dinted and roughened, created a curious illusion of semi-transparency.

I spent most of the morning there and came away baffled. No connection of the Stone with any other artifact in the world suggested itself to me. It was as if the monolith had been reared by alien hands, in an age distant and apart from human ken.

I returned to the village with my interest in no way abated. Now that I had seen the curious thing, my desire was still more keenly whetted to investigate the matter further and seek to learn by what strange hands and for what strange purpose the Black Stone had been reared in the long ago.

I sought out the tavern-keeper's nephew and questioned him in regard to his dreams, but he was vague, though willing to oblige. He did not mind discussing them, but was unable to describe them with any clarity. Though he dreamed the same dreams repeatedly, and though they were hideously vivid at the time, they left no distinct impression on his waking mind. He remembered them only as chaotic nightmares through which huge whirling fires shot lurid tongues of flame and a black drum bellowed incessantly. One thing only he clearly remembered—in one dream he had seen the Black Stone, not on a mountain slope but set like a spire on a colossal black castle.

As for the rest of the villagers I found them not inclined to talk about the Stone, with the exception of the schoolmaster, a man of surprizing education, who spent much more of his time out in the world than any of the rest.

He was much interested in what I told him of Von Junzt's remarks about the Stone, and warmly agreed with the German author in the alleged age of the monolith. He believed that a coven had once existed in the vicinity and that possibly all of the original villagers had been members of that fertility cult which once threatened to undermine European civilization and gave rise to the tales of witchcraft. He cited the very name of the village to prove his point; it had not been originally named Stregoicavar, he said; according to legends the builders had called it Xuthltan, which was the aboriginal name of the site on which the village had been built many centuries ago.

This fact roused again an indescribable feeling of uneasiness. The barbarous name did not suggest connection with any Scythic, Slavic or Mongolian race to which an aboriginal people of these mountains would, under natural circumstances, have belonged.

That the Magyars and Slavs of the lower valleys believed the original inhabitants of the village to be members of the witchcraft cult was evident, the school-

master said, by the name they gave it, which name continued to be used even after the older settlers had been massacred by the Turks, and the village rebuilt by a cleaner and more wholesome breed.

He did not believe that the members of the cult erected the monolith but he did believe that they used it as a center of their activities, and repeating vague legends which had been handed down since before the Turkish invasion, he advanced the theory that the degenerate villagers had used it as a sort of altar on which they offered human sacrifices, using as victims the girls and babies stolen from his own ancestors in the lower valleys.

He discounted the myths of weird events on Midsummer Night, as well as a curious legend of a strange deity which the witch-people of Xuthltan were said to have invoked with chants and wild rituals of flagellation and slaughter.

He had never visited the Stone on Midsummer Night, he said, but he would not fear to do so; whatever *had* existed or taken place there in the past, had been long engulfed in the mists of time and oblivion. The Black Stone had lost its meaning save as a link to a dead and dusty past.

It was while returning from a visit with this schoolmaster one night about a week after my arrival at Stregoicavar that a sudden recollection struck me—it was Midsummer Night! The very time that the legends linked with grisly implications to the Black Stone. I turned away from the tavern and strode swiftly through the village. Stregoicavar lay silent; the villagers retired early. I saw no one as I passed rapidly out of the village and up into the firs which masked the mountain slopes with whispering darkness. A broad silver moon hung above the valley, flooding the crags and slopes in a weird light and etching the shadows blackly. No wind blew through the firs, but a mysterious, intangible rustling and whispering was abroad. Surely on such nights in past centuries, my whimsical imagination told me, naked witches astride magic broomsticks had flown across this valley, pursued by jeering demoniac familiars.

I came to the cliffs and was somewhat disquieted to note that the illusive moonlight lent them a subtle appearance I had not noticed before — in the weird light they appeared less like natural cliffs and more like the ruins of cyclopean and Titan-reared battlements jutting from the mountain-slope.

Shaking off this hallucination with difficulty I came upon the plateau and hesitated a moment before I plunged into the brooding darkness of the woods. A sort of breathless tenseness hung over the shadows, like an unseen monster holding its breath lest it scare away its prey.

I shook off the sensation — a natural one, considering the eeriness of the place and its evil reputation—and made my way through the wood, experiencing a most unpleasant sensation that I was being followed, and halting once, sure that something clammy and unstable had brushed against my face in the darkness.

I came out into the glade and saw the tall monolith rearing its gaunt height above the sward. At the edge of the woods on the side toward the cliffs was a stone which formed a sort of natural seat. I sat down, reflecting that it was probably while there that the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey, had written his fantastic *People of the Monolith*. Mine host thought that it was the Stone which had caused Geoffrey's insanity, but the seeds of madness had been sown in the poet's brain long before he ever came to Stregoicavar.

A glance at my watch showed that the hour of midnight was close at hand. I leaned back, waiting whatever ghostly

demonstration might appear. A thin night wind started up among the branches of the firs, with an uncanny suggestion of faint, unseen pipes whispering an eery and evil tune. The monotony of the sound and my steady gazing at the monolith produced a sort of self-hypnosis upon me; I grew drowsy. I fought this feeling, but sleep stole on me in spite of myself; the monolith seemed to sway and dance, strangely distorted to my gaze, and then I slept.

I OPENED my eyes and sought to rise, but lay still, as if an icy hand gripped me helpless. Cold terror stole over me. The glade was no longer deserted. It was thronged by a silent crowd of strange people, and my distended eyes took in strange barbaric details of costume which my reason told me were archaic and forgotten even in this backward land. Surely, I thought, these are villagers who have come here to hold some fantastic conclave —but another glance told me that these people were not of the folk of Stregoicavar. They were a shorter, more squat race, whose brows were lower, whose faces were broader and duller. Some had Slavic or Magyar features, but those features were degraded as from a mixture of some baser, alien strain I could not classify. Many wore the hides of wild beasts, and their whole appearance, both men and women, was one of sensual brutishness. They terrified and repelled me, but they gave me no heed. They formed in a vast half-circle in front of the monolith and began a sort of chant, flinging their arms in unison and weaving their bodies rythmically from the waist upward. All eyes were fixed on the top of the Stone which they seemed to be invoking. But the strangest of all was the dimness of their voices; not fifty yards from me hundreds of men and women were unmistakably lifting their voices in a wild chant, yet those voices came to me as a faint indistinguishable murmur as if from across vast leagues of Space — or *time*.

Before the monolith stood a sort of brazier from which a vile, nauseous yellow smoke billowed upward, curling curiously in an undulating spiral around the black shaft, like a vast unstable serpent.

On one side of this brazier lay two figures—a young girl, stark naked and bound hand and foot, and an infant, apparently only a few months old. On the other side of the brazier squatted a hideous old hag with a queer sort of black drum on her lap; this drum she beat with slow, light blows of her open palms, but I could not hear the sound.

The rhythm of the swaying bodies grew faster and into the space between the people and the monolith sprang a naked young woman, her eyes blazing, her long black hair flying loose. Spinning dizzily on her toes, she whirled across the open space and fell prostrate before the Stone, where she lay motionless. The next instant a fantastic figure followed her—a man from whose waist hung a goatskin, and whose features were entirely hidden by a sort of mask made from a huge wolf's head, so that he looked like a monstrous, nightmare being, horribly compounded of elements both human and bestial. In his hand he held a bunch of long fir switches bound together at the larger ends, and the moonlight glinted on a chain of heavy gold looped about his neck. A smaller chain depending from it suggested a pendant of some sort, but this was missing.

The people tossed their arms violently and seemed to redouble their shouts as this grotesque creature loped across the open space with many a fantastic leap and caper. Coming to the woman who lay before the monolith, he began to lash her with the switches he bore, and she leaped

up and spun into the wild mazes of the most incredible dance I have ever seen. And her tormentor danced with her, keeping the wild rhythm, matching her every whirl and bound, while incessantly raining cruel blows on her naked body. And at every blow he shouted a single word, over and over, and all the people shouted it back. I could see the working of their lips, and now the faint far-off murmur of their voices merged and blended into one distant shout, repeated over and over with slobbering ecstacy. But what that one word was, I could not make out.

In dizzy whirls spun the wild dancers, while the lookers-on, standing still in their tracks, followed the rhythm of their dance with swaying bodies and weaving arms. Madness grew in the eyes of the capering votaress and was reflected in the eyes of the watchers. Wilder and more extravagant grew the whirling frenzy of that mad dance—it became a bestial and obscene thing, while the old hag howled and battered the drum like a crazy woman, and the switches cracked out a devil's tune.

Blood trickled down the dancer's limbs but she seemed not to feel the lashing save as a stimulus for further enormities of outrageous motion; bounding into the midst of the yellow smoke which now spread out tenuous tentacles to embrace both flying figures, she seemed to merge with that foul fog and veil herself with it. Then emerging into plain view, closely followed by the beast-thing that flogged her, she shot into an indescribable, explosive burst of dynamic mad motion, and on the very crest of that mad wave, she dropped suddenly to the sward, quivering and panting as if completely overcome by her frenzied exertions. The lashing continued with unabated violence and intensity and she began to wriggle toward the monolith on her belly. The priest—or such I will call him—followed, lashing her unprotected body with all the power of his arm as she writhed along, leaving a heavy track of blood on the trampled earth. She reached the monolith, and gasping and panting, flung both arms about it and covered the cold stone with fierce hot kisses, as in frenzied and unholy adoration.

The fantastic priest bounded high in the air, flinging away the red-dabbled switches, and the worshippers, howling and foaming at the mouths, turned on each other with tooth and nail, rending one another's garments and flesh in a blind passion of bestiality. The priest swept up the infant with a long arm, and shouting again that Name, whirled the wailing babe high in the air and dashed its brains out against the monolith, leaving a ghastly stain on the black surface. Cold with horror I saw him rip the tiny body open with his bare brutish fingers and fling handfuls of blood on the shaft, then toss the red and torn shape into the brazier, extinguishing flame and smoke in a crimson rain, while the maddened brutes behind him howled over and over that Name. Then suddenly they all fell prostrate, writhing like snakes, while the priest flung wide his gory hands as in triumph. I opened my mouth to scream my horror and loathing, but only a dry rattle sounded; a huge monstrous toad-like *thing* squatted on the top of the monolith!

I saw its bloated, repulsive and unstable outline against the moonlight, and set in what would have been the face of a natural creature, its huge, blinking eyes which reflected all the lust, abysmal greed, obscene cruelty and monstrous evil that has stalked the sons of men since their ancestors mowed blind and hairless in the tree-tops. In those grisly eyes were mirrored all the unholy things and vile secrets that sleep in the cities under the sea, and that skulk from the light of day,

in the blackness of primordial caverns. And so that ghastly thing that the unhallowed ritual of cruelty and sadism and blood had evoked from the silence of the hills, leered and blinked down on its bestial worshippers, who groveled in abhorrent abasement before it.

Now the beast-masked priest lifted the bound and weakly writhing girl in his brutish hands and held her up toward that horror on the monolith. And as that monstrosity sucked in its breath, lustfully and slobberingly, something snapped in my brain and I fell into a merciful faint.

I OPENED my eyes on a still white dawn. All the events of the night rushed back on me and I sprang up, then stared about me in amazement. The monolith brooded gaunt and silent above the sward which waved, green and untrampled, in the morning breeze. A few quick strides took me across the glade; here had the dancers leaped and bounded until the ground should have been trampled bare, and here had the votaress wriggled her painful way to the Stone, streaming blood on the earth. But no drop of crimson showed on the uncrushed sward. I looked, shudderingly, at the side of the monolith against which the bestial priest had brained the stolen baby—but no dark stain nor grisly clot showed there.

A dream! It had been a wild nightmare—or else—I shrugged my shoulders. What vivid clarity for a dream!

I returned quietly to the village and entered the inn without being seen. And there I sat meditating over the strange events of the night. More and more was I prone to discard the dream-theory. That what I had seen was illusion and without material substance, was evident. But I believed that I had looked on the mirrored shadow of a deed perpetrated in ghastly actuality in bygone days. But how was I to know? What proof to show that my vision had been a gathering of foul specters rather than a mere nightmare originating in my own brain?

As if for answer a name flashed into my mind—Selim Bahadur! According to legend this man, who had been a soldier as well as a scribe, had commanded that part of Suleiman's army which had devastated Stregoicavar; it seemed logical enough; and if so, he had gone straight from the blotted-out countryside to the bloody field of Schomvaal, and his doom. I sprang up with a sudden shout—that manuscript which was taken from the Turk's body, and which Count Boris shuddered over—might it not contain some narration of what the conquering Turks found in Stregoicavar? What else could have shaken the iron nerves of the Polish adventurer? And since the bones of the Count had never been recovered, what more certain than that the lacquered case, with its mysterious contents, still lay hidden beneath the ruins that covered Boris Vladinoff? I began packing my bag with fierce haste.

THREE days later found me ensconced in a little village a few miles from the old battlefield, and when the moon rose I was working with savage intensity on the great pile of crumbling stone that crowned the hill. It was back-breaking toil—looking back now I can not see how I accomplished it, though I labored without a pause from moonrise to dawn. Just as the sun was coming up I tore aside the last tangle of stones and looked on all that was mortal of Count Boris Vladinoff—only a few pitiful fragments of crumbling bone—and among them, crushed out of all original shape, lay a case whose lacquered surface had kept it from complete decay through the centuries.

I seized it with frenzied eagerness, and piling back some of the stones on the bones I hurried away; for I did not care

to be discovered by the suspicious peasants in an act of apparent desecration.

Back in my tavern chamber I opened the case and found the parchment comparatively intact; and there was something else in the case—a small squat object wrapped in silk. I was wild to plumb the secrets of those yellowed pages, but weariness forbade me. Since leaving Stregoicavar I had hardly slept at all, and the terrific exertions of the previous night combined to overcome me. In spite of myself I was forced to stretch myself on my bed, nor did I awake until sundown.

I snatched a hasty supper, and then in the light of a flickering candle, I set myself to read the neat Turkish characters that covered the parchment. It was difficult work, for I am not deeply versed in the language and the archaic style of the narrative baffled me. But as I toiled through it a word or a phrase here and there leaped at me and a dimly growing horror shook me in its grip. I bent my energies fiercely to the task, and as the tale grew clearer and took more tangible form my blood chilled in my veins, my hair stood up and my tongue clove to my mouth. All external things partook of the grisly madness of that infernal manuscript until the night sounds of insects and creatures in the woods took the form of ghastly murmurings and stealthy treadings of ghoulish horrors and the sighing of the night wind changed to tittering obscene gloating of evil over the souls of men.

At last when gray dawn was stealing through the latticed window, I laid down the manuscript and took up and unwrapped the thing in the bit of silk. Staring at it with haggard eyes I knew the truth of the matter was clinched, even had it been possible to doubt the veracity of that terrible manuscript.

And I replaced both obscene things in the case, nor did I rest or sleep or eat until that case containing them had been weighted with stones and flung into the deepest current of the Danube which, God grant, carried them back into the Hell from which they came.

It was no dream I dreamed on Midsummer Midnight in the hills above Stregoicavar. Well for Justin Geoffrey that he tarried there only in the sunlight and went his way, for had he gazed upon that ghastly conclave, his mad brain would have snapped before it did. How my own reason held, I do not know.

No—it was no dream—I gazed upon a foul rout of votaries long dead, come up from Hell to worship as of old; ghosts that bowed before a ghost. For Hell has long claimed their hideous god. Long, long he dwelt among the hills, a brain-shattering vestige of an outworn age, but no longer his obscene talons clutch for the souls of living men, and his kingdom is a dead kingdom, peopled only by the ghosts of those who served him in his lifetime and theirs.

By what foul alchemy or godless sorcery the Gates of Hell are opened on that one eery night I do not know, but mine own eyes have seen. And I know I looked on no living thing that night, for the manuscript written in the careful hand of Selim Bahadur narrated at length what he and his raiders found in the valley of Stregoicavar; and I read, set down in detail, the blasphemous obscenities that torture wrung from the lips of screaming worshippers; and I read, too, of the lost, grim black cavern high in the hills where the horrified Turks hemmed a monstrous, bloated, wallowing toad-like being and slew it with flame and ancient steel blessed in old times by Muhammad, and with incantations that were old when Arabia was young. And even staunch old Selim's hand shook as he recorded the cataclysmic, earth-shaking death-howls of the monstrosity, which died not alone; for

a half-score of his slayers perished with him, in ways that Selim would not or could not describe.

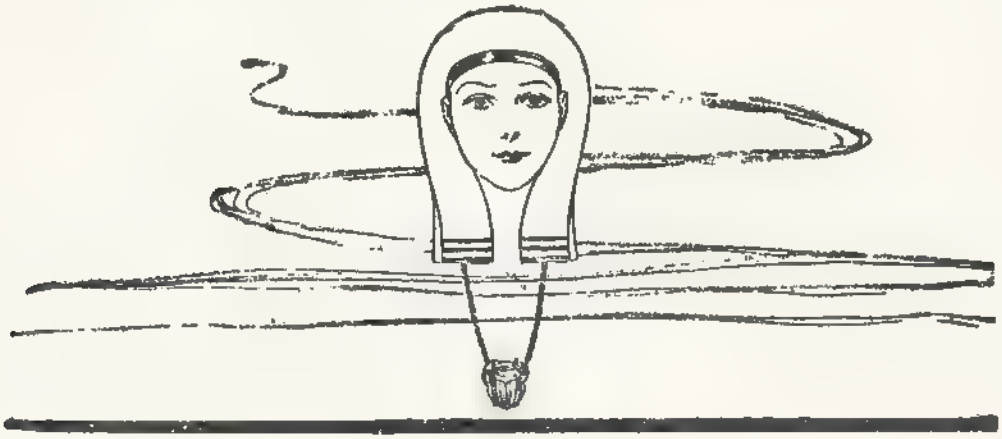
And the squat idol carved of gold and wrapped in silk was an image of *himself*, and Selim tore it from the golden chain that looped the neck of the slain high priest of the mask.

Well that the Turks swept that foul valley with torch and cleanly steel! Such sights as those brooding mountains have looked on belong to the darkness and abysses of lost eons. No—it is not fear of the toad-thing that makes me shudder in the night. He is made fast in Hell with his nauseous horde, freed only for an hour on the most weird night of the year, as I have seen. And of his worshippers, none remains.

But it is the realization that such things once crouched beast-like above the souls of men which brings cold sweat to my brow; and I fear to peer again into the leaves of Von Junzt's abomination. For now I understand his repeated phrase of *keys!*—aye! Keys to Outer Doors—links with an abhorrent past and—who knows?—of abhorrent spheres of the *present*. And I understand why the cliffs look like battlements in the moonlight and why the tavern-keeper's nightmare-haunted nephew saw in his dream, the Black Stone like a spire on a cyclopean black castle. If men ever excavate among those mountains they may find incredible things below those masking slopes. For the cave wherein the Turks trapped the—*thing*—was not truly a cavern, and I shudder to contemplate the gigantic gulf of eons which must stretch between this age and the time when the earth shook herself and reared up, like a wave, those blue mountains that, rising, enveloped unthinkable things. May no man ever seek to uproot that ghastly spire men call the Black Stone!

A Key! Aye, it is a Key, symbol of a forgotten horror. That horror has faded into the limbo from which it crawled, loathsomely, in the black dawn of the earth. But what of the other fiendish possibilities hinted at by Von Junzt—what of the monstrous hand which strangled out his life? Since reading what Selim Bahadur wrote, I can no longer doubt anything in the Black Book. Man was not always master of the earth—*and is he now?*

And the thought recurs to me—if such a monstrous entity as the Master of the Monolith somehow survived its own unspeakably distant epoch so long—*what nameless shapes may even now lurk in the dark places of the world?*



The Ghost That Never Died

By ELIZABETH SHELDON

The story of a young woman and an old man who were done to death by the ghost of a person who was still alive

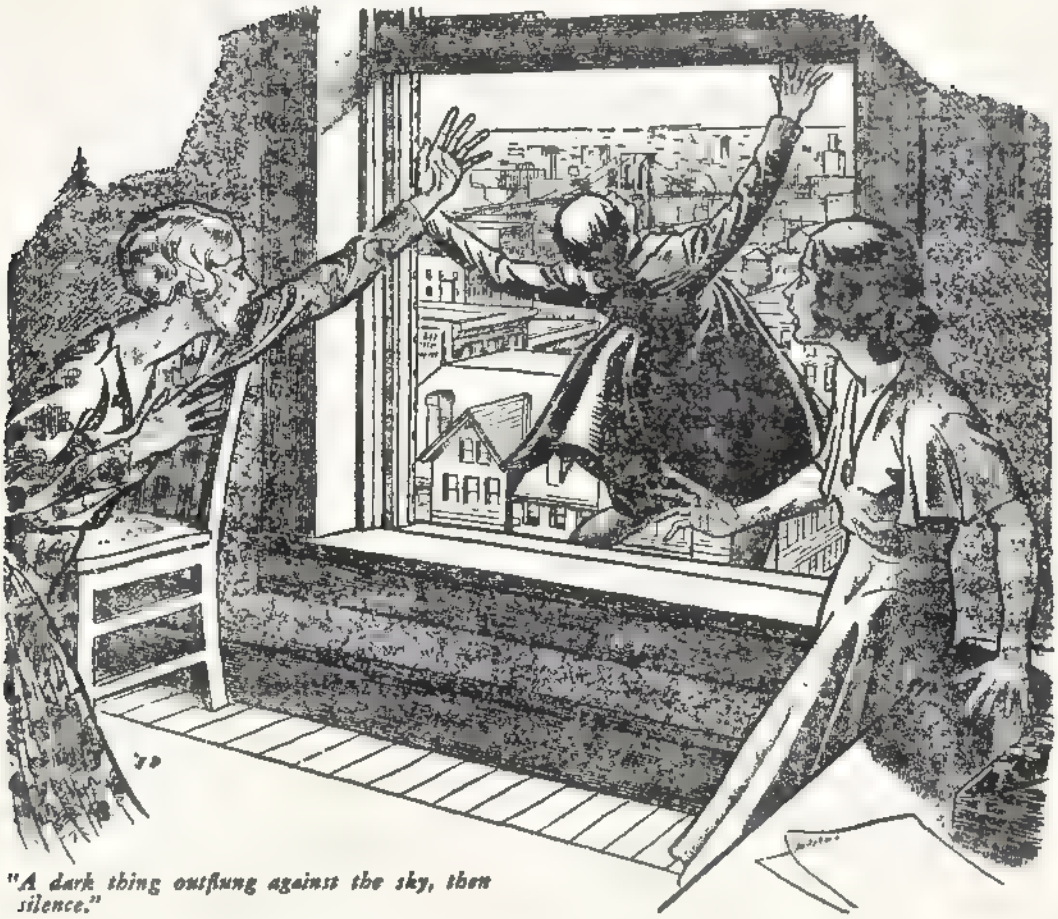
I SUPPOSE few people will believe the story of Miriam Tromley's death and its sequel, even today. That is why I had never told of the strange things I had seen, either at the inquest or afterward. I might have confessed it to the police, shrieked it aloud on Broadway. Who would have believed me then? But the time is not far off when the world will know that such things can be.

I was Evelyn's stenographer for three years. It was a queer job. I guess old Parton, whose name adorned the title page of the magazine, hardly knew how he came to be an editor. It had started as a sort of advertisement bulletin for his cereals and tinned food; then Miriam Tromley came to be his secretary. She had been an editor on a woman's magazine. She was a nervous little woman with all sorts of half-baked talents, and the first thing old Parton knew she had turned his biscuit literature into a magazine.

The magazine—*Mother and Child,* you must remember it—grew larger and thicker until it needed another worker in the editorial department. Miriam Tromley had a friend who, according to her own tale, was in the hardest kind of ill-luck at the time, and she convinced stingy old Parton that *Mother and Child* needed her afflicted friend's services. That friend was Evelyn Renard. This all happened about a year before they took me on. When I arrived on the scene, Evelyn had been promoted from assistant to co-editor. When I went in answer to their advertisement for a stenographer it was Evelyn Renard who interviewed me. I remember so well my first impression of her. She seemed to have risen hastily as I entered, and stood at her desk ill at ease, although I was only a prospective stenographer. I felt as if she had hurriedly concealed something as I entered. I do not mean this literally, it was just the impression of something furtive about the woman herself. When you were in the room with her she did not look at you, she *watched* you like an animal ready to anticipate the movements of its enemy.

Evelyn had not a single point of beauty unless it was her too-bright dark eyes, but she had a sort of feverish gayety and seemed to attract certain types of men. She was almost always pleasant with the people in the office, yet I always felt something reptilian about her, and strange to say, she had a liking for snakes instead of the repulsion most of us feel for them.

I always felt sorry for Miriam Tromley. She seemed the sort of woman that needs protection. She ought to have been married. She was not pretty and she lacked repose, a frail, faded little woman, neither young nor old. Sometimes she looked decidedly pretty. She knew twice as much as her co-editor, but she lacked assurance; whereas Evelyn Renard was a raw, shameless and brilliant faker. No one knew anything about her antecedents. She laid claim to a millionaire French-



"A dark thing outflung against the sky, then silence."

Canadian father who had lost his money in disastrous speculations.

She engaged me at an unusually small salary, but I was not in a position to be particular just then. I afterward learned that Evelyn had done some very efficient work reducing the salaries of the entire staff after her promotion, although she always attributed this policy to some hard-hearted power above her.

For a time I lost sight of my first disagreeable impression of her, for Evelyn, as I have said, was friendly with all the office employees, and she told such pathetic stories about herself that every one pitied her. Even hard old Parton made her work as easy as possible, while Miriam Tromley, who had an income of her own, was always responding to some dire need of Evelyn's, and incidentally spent hours doing Evelyn's work—for which she received scant thanks.

Old Parton had had rather a fancy for Miriam Tromley at the start. At the time Evelyn appeared upon the scene, Miss Sampson says, they all thought he would marry her, but after Evelyn came Miriam's influence declined. She made him believe that Miriam was inefficient. It did not come about too quickly. Miriam never suspected, but no one else was much surprized when Evelyn Renard was put over her. Evelyn was then editor-in-chief. When that happened we could all prophesy the next step, which would, of course, be the total exit of Miriam.

We all knew it but Miriam. She seemed restless and a little anxious at times, but, whatever she may have feared she was never suspicious of Evelyn.

"Miss Tromley doesn't need the money," Miss Sampson said to me one day, "but she likes the work here. She's one of those restless women. I think the poor soul will get quite melancholy if Evelyn pries her out of her job altogether."

By that time I had begun to lose my sympathy with our afflicted employer. She worked us too hard, and I had seen too much of the inner workings of office politics.

"She'll make a grand political boss when women really get their teeth into politics," said Miss Sampson the day we uncovered the maternity corset graft that was going on on the woman's page.

One day when Miss Renard was ill I went to her apartment to take some dictation, and afterward she got talking. She said she was lonely. *I* think she was afraid to be alone. Anyway, she indulged in some of the wildest flights of fancy I ever heard from a sane person.

"One day, Miss Morton," she said, "I went into my room and saw myself lying on the bed. Now what do you think of that?"

I thought at the time, "My dear Madam, I'd hate to tell you what I think of it!" And I remembered my first impression—that there was something uncanny about Evelyn Renard.

There was a young man named Chalmers around her in those days. I am sure I don't know what he saw in Evelyn. Perhaps it was only that her apartment was a place where he could lounge and talk and eat. Chalmers was a babbling sort of youth. People wouldn't take him seriously for some reason, yet he was in a way a genius who did not know how to make any practical use of his gifts. But Evelyn knew how to use them! oh, yes. He furnished her with the material for all the articles she wrote. I don't believe Evelyn ever had an idea in her life. I don't think she *wanted* to have one. She preferred to use her neighbor's. She liked the idea of having other people do her work for her.

It was from poor Chalmers that Evelyn got her great idea that turned *Mother and Child* into the biggest money-making proposition in the publishing business.

There were other ideas, too, that he let fall into the hothouse soil of Evelyn's mind in his loose incessant babbling.

"Some crook will make a lot of money that way some day," I heard him say once, and I noted the radiant furtiveness of Evelyn's eyes as she listened. I could almost hear her think, "I'll be that one!" I remembered that look last autumn when I heard of the palatial apartment she had purchased in a co-operative apartment building on Fifth Avenue. By a curious coincidence I saw Chalmers the same day looking as if he had definitely come down to the park bench plane of existence.

The next month came the exposure of the maternity corset. Of course Evelyn contrived to keep her skirts clear of it. I don't know how much old Parton was on to the mechanism of it, but as the office boy says, I was "wise to it" from the beginning, and I don't believe Evelyn ever knew that I knew. If she did, what a fool she must have thought me not to have blackmailed her out of a good income with my knowledge! That is what *she* would have done in my place.

Occasionally I used to catch glimpses of Miriam Tromley looking worried and anchorless, coming in and out of the office. She had not been able to get another position. She used to come in to see Evelyn at times when she knew old Parton would be out. Evelyn had suc-

ceeded in making a complete breach between them. At the same time she sympathized ardently with Miriam for the injustice that had been done her.

"Men are like that," I heard her say one day in accents of bitter sympathy to Miriam. "The more you do for them the more they expect. You poor dear! You worked yourself to death for old Parton and this is what you get for it."

I have never known just the nature of the crooked deal that Evelyn put over. It was an opportunity that came to her in some way through the office. Some dishonorable use that she made of inside information. She covered her tracks to the end. The trouble came because she began to be afraid that Miriam knew about it, and as a result to be haunted by the fear of exposure.

Miriam had come in one day while Evelyn was having a conference with an advertising man. She was obliged to go with the man into another office, leaving Miriam alone beside her desk with her papers spread out on top of it.

I think that was the beginning of her suspicion that Miriam knew what she was up to, although *I* knew that Miss Tromley was incapable of reading other people's letters. But Evelyn, like many people who do such things themselves, was ready to suspect others of her own proclivities.

From that day on I could see that Evelyn was afraid of Miriam. Later I knew that she hated her. I imagine that people like Evelyn Renard always hate those who have given them their start, especially when *they* have done their benefactor an injury in return.

Of course there was something in those papers that Evelyn had reason to be very nervous about. I had known for some time that she had papers which she kept locked up as if she were in the secret service.

ONE afternoon after leaving the office I found that I had left behind a pile of manuscripts I had to read, and I went back to get them.

As I opened the door of Miss Renard's office I distinctly saw her at her desk drawing out a paper from a drawer that she always kept locked.

"Why, Miss Renard, I though you had left long ago!" I exclaimed. As I walked in I knocked against a pile of books and papers on the corner of a desk and they began to fall to the floor. I bent to pick them up, and when I rose again—about the space of two seconds—Miss Renard was gone. She must have slipped out the other door, but how she managed it so noiselessly I don't know.

I told her about it the next day, and while I was telling it I noticed a curious sort of glitter in her eyes—snake-like I called it to myself. She dismissed me and my anecdote a little shortly.

"You were day-dreaming, Miss Morton; I was in a suburban train on my way to Rye at that time yesterday, and asleep at that. I nearly went past my station."

As it happened I had proof afterward that she had told me the truth, for Miss Sampson who lives in Mt. Vernon was on the same train, but all the same I felt sure that Evelyn Renard was living some sort of a double life, for I saw some queer goings on in those days.

For one thing I felt sure that she "shadowed" Miriam Tromley. Miriam had finally found an advertising position of some sort, and did not come in so often. When she did, Evelyn's dread was most apparent. There was certainly something that she was terribly afraid to have Miriam find out. Twice after dark I saw her following Miriam, always at a little distance behind her, and walking more noiselessly than you would believe a human being could walk.

One day when Miriam had left the

office I caught Evelyn looking after her with an expression that actually made me shiver. She must have noticed the look on my face, for she quietly rearranged her features and said with the sweetest tone of false sympathy—one I had come to know so well:

"Dear Miss Tromley is not looking so well. Haven't you noticed it? I am really troubled about her."

I muttered that I hadn't noticed it especially, and as our eyes met I knew with a sense of chill along my spine, that the editor of *Mother and Child* wished that her former benefactor was dead.

The next day I overheard part of a conversation between them that seemed rather to give reality to Evelyn's fears, which I had taken to be just the imaginary alarms of a guilty conscience.

"You are making a mistake, Evelyn," I heard Miriam say, "and if I can't make you see it I will have to take some other means of stopping it."

Then Evelyn's voice, rasping and hard, "Go ahead—I don't care! You needn't think that *you* can down me——"

That was all I heard, but enough to know that Miriam seemed to be threatening some sort of exposure, and that Evelyn's mood was determined and defiant.

I did not know what it was about then. Afterward I was able to make a shrewd guess.

The next day was the strangest of my life. Afterward I wondered if I had lost my reason temporarily, if I had suffered from delusions, but now I understand. . . . I will tell it exactly as it happened.

In the first place it leaked out—as such things usually do—that Evelyn had hooked old Parton. They were to be married quietly the next day. It had long been a betting proposition in the office, with the odds on Evelyn's side. At least all the women except the new flapper stenog had bet on her.

Just before five o'clock, Miriam called to see Evelyn and was refused. The editor's door was closed to all visitors. Something in the make-up had to be changed at the last minute, and Evelyn had ordered her dinner sent in. She was going to work until she was through, she said, and short of a bomb explosion or a fire in the building—so she instructed the night operator—no one was to knock on her door.

As I stood inside the street entrance pursuing an elusive nickel in the depths of my bag, and capturing only innumerable pennies, I caught sight of the dismissed Miriam hanging indecisively on the outskirts of the crowd hurrying subway-wards. I remembered afterward her bewildered disconsolate expression and, what I had not realized before, the peculiar indecision, the marked weakness of the face. It occurred to me that she had in some way depended upon Evelyn's hard selfish strength, and that without her she was rudderless, like a lost dog without its master.

Just as I had captured my nickel and started to go, the elevator came down and I saw Evelyn—supposedly locked up in her office at work, slip out and pass silently out to the street.

It did not surprize me. I think I always expected Evelyn to have some different purpose from the one she openly owned up to, and I should have thought nothing of it if it had not been for Miriam's strange treatment of her.

Evelyn walked directly up to Miriam, but Miriam simply stared straight into her face and walked past as if she were not there at all. I don't mean that Miriam *cut* her, but that she looked—or seemed to look—directly at the spot where Evelyn stood without seeing her. Certainly

Miriam must be in some disturbed state of mind for such absent-mindedness to be possible when faced by the very person she had come to see!

Miriam turned toward Fifth Avenue; Evelyn followed at a short distance, and, my curiosity and apprehension now thoroughly awake, I followed them both.

Evelyn did not make any effort to overtake Miriam. She slipped quietly after her through the crowd in an eel-like way she had, so close behind I marvelled that Miriam never once saw her. She *did* seem to have some sense of being followed. Twice she turned and looked back, but (I remembered afterward) although the second time she caught sight of *me* and bowed, she never once saw Evelyn.

I followed them all the way to Miriam's apartment in Greenwich Village. She lived in a sort of studio building, an old house with dark winding halls. And never once during that strange walk did Miriam discover that Evelyn was following her. Never once did Evelyn discover *me!*

At the door of her apartment Miriam paused to let herself in, while Evelyn drew back into the shadow.

I waited farther back, near the stairs. It was not long before Miriam came out again—to go to her dinner perhaps, or to get something to cook at home. I saw Evelyn creep nearer. There was only a dim gas-jet burning far down the hall; otherwise the place was almost dark.

As Miriam stood in the doorway of her room, a pathetic little silhouette against the light, at last Evelyn went openly up to her and spoke. At least I *thought* she spoke, although I heard no sound. Miriam turned to look at her vaguely . . . without surprize. Evelyn seemed to be urging her to do something, and Miriam listened with her eyes cast down like one in thought, but she did not answer.

After a moment she turned back into her room, and noiselessly Evelyn slipped through the door after her, close on her heels.

They left it open. I stood on the threshold of Miriam's apartment uneasy and irresolute, watching them. Still without speaking, Miriam went to the bathroom, turned on the light, took a small bottle from the medicine cabinet and picked up a glass, while silent Evelyn watched. I could see it all from where I stood. And still neither of them spoke, only the place seemed filled with the electric pulsations of Evelyn's *will*.

I saw Miriam pour the contents of the vial into a glass; then for a moment she seemed to hesitate, and in that interval Miriam seemed to grow vague and weak, while Evelyn became strong, *tall*, terrific. . . . She was advising Miriam, but it was advice that was more like a threat or a command. Even then I did not suspect. How could I have understood? I knew nothing of these things then . . . not until Miriam raised the glass to her lips—not until it fell from her nerveless fingers, and I saw her turn with a dazed face half falling into a chair, did I realize what the glass must have contained. . . .

She saw me then, she called my name. I jumped forward just in time to save her from falling, then turned to Evelyn just as she was escaping from the room. I sprang after her and caught her wrist, but it slipped from my grasp . . . something cool and light . . . not solid . . . yet cold, with a curious indescribable coldness. . . For a long time I could feel the sensation of it, like menthol on my hand. Then I bent over Miriam—she was totally unconscious.

I found an art student in a neighboring studio. We got the poor girl into her bed and telephoned for a doctor, but he was too late. It was cyanide, and death had been instantaneous.

And now I come to the strangest part of my story. After I got home that night about nine o'clock, I rang up Miss Wharton, Mr. Parton's secretary, to tell her of poor Miriam Tromley's death, and learned that she had gone back to Evelyn's apartment that night at eight o'clock—old Parton had sent her—because he could get no answer from her telephone—and had found her in bed in charge of a trained nurse! The doctor had just left. It seemed that Evelyn had had some sort of a seizure while working alone in her office. Miss Wharton (who had not been employed in the office very long) found the case most pathetic.

"No one knows how long she had lain there unconscious, poor soul, all alone, with no one to come to her help! The watchman found her lying beside her desk. He noticed the light and went to investigate."

"The night watchman!" I repeated. "Do you know what time it was?"

"No, it wasn't the night watchman, it was James. He found her just before he left, and he leaves, doesn't he, at half-past six?"

Half-past six! The very hour of Miriam Tromley's death. For by a curious impulse I had glanced at my wrist watch when the doctor had dropped Miriam's hand and pronounced her dead.

According to that, Evelyn Renard was in her own office at the very moment I had seen her leave Miriam Tromley's apartment forty blocks away!

Almost beside myself, I hung up the receiver without bidding Miss Wharton good-bye and went straight to Evelyn Renard's house and asked for the nurse. She looked a little curious when she saw my face. I think she thought that I was Evelyn's next of kin in a state of distraction.

"I can't imagine what brought on Miss Renard's attack," she said. "She seemed to be in a sort of trance when they found her. She must have been dead set on something, for her face was fixed with the look of a man in a death grip. It was awful to see that look on her white unconscious face. Seemed like she must have been making some big mental drive and just dropped off after it like that."

"They found her about half-past six?" I asked.

The nurse stared as if she found my question odd.

"So I understand," she said and returned to her patient. I could hear her moaning faintly—rather a dreadful sound.

It was a fact then, Evelyn *had* been in her own office in a fainting-fit at the very hour when I had seen her urging Miriam Tromley to take her own life!

The marriage was postponed for a time. Three days later Evelyn came back to the office. She went about looking so white and appealing that even the publicity manager pitied her.

"Poor girl, how she feels her friend's death!" he said.

I never told what I had seen. How could I have told it in the face of the facts? With her own hand Miriam Tromley had lifted the glass of poison to her lips. Had I not seen her in the very act?

About a month afterward Evelyn had what the doctors called a nervous breakdown—a breakdown with delusions. She told me one of them a few days before they took her away to the sanitarium. We were alone in the office.

I had just said to her, "You really ought to take a rest, Miss Renard. You are just keeping up on will-power."

And she had answered, "Perhaps I am. It is wonderful what one's will can do." She bent toward me like one telling a secret. "Did you know that you can make

your will do things at a distance when you are asleep?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, controlling my impulse to draw back from her.

She leaned nearer with a look I didn't like to meet in her murky eyes. "Why, don't you know? You can go to bed at night and set your will to do something you want to accomplish—miles away—and it will do the thing for you, just as if you were there. Sometimes you can half remember it afterward . . . like a dream."

I remembered that conversation afterward . . . when old Parton died.

Evelyn did not stay long in the sanitarium. In two weeks she was back in the office completely restored.

Miriam Tromley had not been dead a month when Evelyn Renard became Evelyn Parton. Summer was approaching. Of course she gave up her job at the office—although she playfully remarked, she should always keep an eye on it—and she did.

Mr. and Mrs. Parton sailed on the newest highest-priced steamer for Europe in June. That was the last we ever saw of old Parton. He died suddenly in an obscure town in Italy, leaving Evelyn his sole heir. She was now sole owner of the business, not to speak of all that it had made.

I feel dreadfully about old Parton's death. How can I do otherwise? If I had told what I had seen it might have saved his life.

He had walked off an upper balcony in his sleep, so they told us. . . . But who had urged him out there . . . a useless old incumbrance now that his will was made and his fortune safely within Evelyn's grasp?

I can see a dark shadowy figure behind poor old Parton, softly urging him over the brink, a spirit you might call it, a ghost that never died. "Ghosts of the living," the Japanese call them, the soul sent out in sleep. Is not sleep Death's Sister? Evelyn had concentrated upon Miriam's death, willing her to self-destruction. Sometimes it is known as astral murder.

It would appear to be the perfect crime, wouldn't it, evidence upon which no jury would convict? But Evelyn's career did not end with Miriam Tromley, or even with old Parton.

IT SEEMED for a time as if nothing could stop Evelyn. Strange that little Blanche O'Hara should have been the one.

Blanche was MacDonough's private secretary. MacDonough was our business manager and a very keen man. I am sure he never cared for Evelyn, although of course he was far from guessing what she really was. He was fond of Blanche, whether fond enough to marry her one couldn't tell, but at least his favor made Blanche a person of some consequence, and Evelyn had always feared discovery—strange mixture that she was of iron will and cowardice.

She never dreamed that I suspected her—luckily for me—or I should have gone the way of poor Miriam and old Parton. But for some reason her apprehensions and suspicions fastened upon Blanche. Evelyn more or less took charge of the business after old Parton died. She never had an office in the building, but at least once in the day she would drop in on us—of course at the time she thought she was least expected; and quite often if MacDonough was out, or really busy, this brought her in touch with Blanche.

I don't believe Blanche had the faintest suspicion of what Evelyn was like. She was a frank, straightforward child, with great, clear, rather light blue eyes. Though light, they were very striking, be-

cause her eyelashes were long, and dark like her hair. They were rather uncanny eyes, and she had a way of fixing them upon you and leaving them there. She was probably thinking of something else when she did it, most likely MacDonough, but she certainly made you feel as if she was reading your innermost thoughts, piercing your very soul. It would have been a hard thing to lie to Blanche. I could see that her eyes got on Evelyn's nerves. She would do anything rather than meet them.

Blanche was a good kid, clean straight through. Like the heroine in the old-fashioned melodrama, she was the sole support of a widowed mother. But she was not sentimental about it, never made capital out of it, or regretted the necessity to go without little feminine vanities because of it.

It seems that I was predestined to the role of onlooker, for I was the sole witness of that momentous last meeting between Evelyn and Blanche.

It was one of those warmish days in winter when New York offices seem unbearably hot. Evelyn had dropped in at noon when she knew MacDonough would be out. That made me curious to start with, because I knew it meant that this time, instead of avoiding, she wanted to see Blanche. MacDonough did quite a bit of business at luncheon, and consequently was often absent for a long time at that hour. While he was out Blanche was obliged to be in. Of course Evelyn knew that.

The first thing Evelyn did when she entered was to ask to have the window wide open. It was I who had ushered her in, and I remained near the doorway frankly watching. For some reason Evelyn thought me of no account. She never seemed to notice my comings or goings.

Blanche went to the window and threw it all the way up. Evelyn stole up behind her like a shadow. She never seemed to walk so that we heard her, and she almost always dressed in black. Evelyn leaned against the right-hand side of the window-ledge, Blanche was at the left.

"What a perfectly gorgeous day!" Blanche said, and leaned out, drawing in long breaths.

"What a view from this window!" Evelyn answered. "Why, all those buildings are on Long Island! I wonder what that tall tower is."

She pointed to something real or imaginary so far to the north that Blanche had to lean quite far out to see it. The window-ledge was rather low, and it made me nervous to see Blanche do it. I don't know what it was that suddenly made me look from Blanche to Evelyn.

No, Evelyn had no intention of pushing her out, not with her hands. But if you could have seen her eyes! Never so long as I live shall I forget them—a snake's eyes sending out live fires of hatred—hatred and something else. . . .

I knew what it was. It was the thing that must be in a snake's eyes when it is charming the dove to its death.

Farther and farther little Blanche leaned out; a scream rose to my lips, I made a dart forward; then, sharply, Blanche drew in and turned her eyes upon Evelyn. And under her eyes Evelyn seemed to shrink and withdraw within herself, as if like the demon in a fairy story she was going to vanish. But she did not vanish. She stood staring, staring at Blanche, straight into those wide, clear, pure blue eyes.

It was the strangest thing I have ever seen. From her evil murky eyes Evelyn was sending out something, something that was a veritable missile of death, sending it straight into Blanche's eyes. For a moment she was able to send it as

a writhing snake may spit out venom in its last hour. But the thing that she sent could not reach its victim. From that clear light it rebounded back to its source, straight into the evil soul that lay behind Evelyn's dark eyes. A boomerang!

She made a wild movement like a creature shot. Blanche screamed; for a second, a dark thing outflung against the sky . . . then silence. Twenty stories below, Evelyn Parton lay on the sidewalk, broken beyond recognition in the midst of the wild panic of the passers-by.

Miriam Tromley was timid and neurotic, Parton was a feeble old man. But Blanche, young, strong, clean of soul, was not vulnerable to Evelyn's evil power, which, deflected from its target, rebounded upon her who sent it, forcing her to the suicidal act she had tried to will Blanche to perform.

When MacDonough married Blanche he took new offices in another building, for never afterward could Blanche bear to go in that room. I think little as she sensed what had happened there, she did realize that she had been very close to the great force of Evil in that place.

The Empty House

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

Its windows stare like gaunt eyes at a road
Now weed-grown, voiced with rasping croak of toad
And crow and with the wind's shrill moan at dawn,
For all the things that once lived here are gone.

An empty shell, forsaken by its host,
Its gloomy rooms are now abode for ghost
And pixy and the spiders in its halls,
And something that at midnight crawls—and crawls.

Gray dust upon its stairways lies in heaps
Unmarred save where a shadow slides and creeps,
And where the tiny feet of mice have played
In scampered rhythm where the drafts have prayed.

Once there was laughter here beneath its roof,
Now there is silence, strangely weird, aloof—
Once there were voices and at noon a song,
Now there is stillness and the nights are long.

Only the aching silences remain
Behind the gloomy door and dusty pane,
And the black shadows that forever creep
Through empty houses and their vigil keep.

Tam, Son of the Tiger

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Gods of Asia, weird monsters and human beings mingle as this vivid novel moves swiftly to its climax

The Story Thus Far

TAM, infant son of Major Charles Evans, American sportsman in Burma, was carried off by a white tigress and reared by her. The tigress had been cared for by a lama named Lozong, who had left her with her cub in a ruined pagoda in the jungle. Lozong returned to find the cub full-grown and Tam, about twelve years old, living with his strange foster-mother and brother.

Tam believed himself a tiger and acted as such until the Lama taught him languages, much of other branches of learning and the use of weapons.

One of Tam's jungle friends was a huge elephant he had named Ganesha. When Ganesha strayed, Tam went in search of him and rescued a beautiful girl in golden armor from a man-eating tiger. In language that resembled Sanscrit and Tibetan, both of which Tam understood, she told him that she was Nina, Princess of Arya, a country in a subterranean world called Iramatri.

Tam and the girl were attacked by four-armed giants riding beasts larger than elephants. Nina was carried off and Tam, stunned by a blow, was left for dead. Ganesha arrived as Tam recovered his senses and the jungle boy set off with the elephant in search of Nina. The trail led through a secret passage under the hills into a subterranean jungle. Here Tam was dragged from Ganesha by an andrewsarchus—a huge prehistoric carnivore.

Meanwhile, Tam's father, who had devoted his life to killing tigers, had seen Nina's bodyguard massacred by the four-armed white giants or Saivas. Major Evans and his party trailed the victors and met Lozong with the white tigress and her cub, seeking Tam.

Lozong and Evans joined forces and followed Tam into the underground world where the major sighted his son in time to save him from the andrewsarchus by a long-range shot. Then the Lozong-Evans party was captured by some blue four-armed giants.

Tam continued on Nina's trail until he was made prisoner by Saivas and taken to a city where he was condemned to be devoured by a hideous creature in a pit. He managed to escape and rescue Nina from warriors who were taking her to Siva.

Lozong and the two tigers also managed to escape and renewed their search for Tam. Ganesha, too, was hunting Tam and Lozong found a place where the elephant's trail merged with those of Tam and Nina.

Nina told Tam they must reach the Place of the Gods ahead of Siva to avert disaster to mankind, as Siva would ask for weapons of a terrible sort. In order to prevent this, she said, they must first go to her capital, Aryatun, and equip an expedition.

That night Tam wove a tree-top nest for Nina. The next morning, while taking fruit to her, a tree-cat leaped on him and knocked him off a limb a hundred feet from the ground. Falling on the tree-cat, he broke its back and was unhurt.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

"Tam stood in more deadly peril than he had ever been in before as the horned and armor-plated horror charged."

Lozong and the tigers appeared at this juncture.

Nina, Tam and Lozong rode away on the elephant and camped that night on the bank of a small stream. During the night Nina was captured by a monkey as large as a man, a minion of Hanuman, the monkey-god, which carried her away to a treetop city in Hanumavarta. Tam followed through the treetops and rescued her while Lozong, the tigers and the elephant followed on the ground.

Tam's father and his party had been captured by the Vaishnavas, taken before Vishnu and condemned to slavery, but the major secretly planned their escape.

Tam and Nina traveled toward Aryatun, guided by a little instrument she carried, the indicator of which always pointed toward her city. Crossing a river into the country of Brahmavarta and passing through a swamp filled with horrible plants and monsters, Tam suddenly was jerked upward by a rope dropped from a tree. He cut the rope and hurled his javelin upward, spearing a dog-faced man which Nina called a *manacvan.* Soon afterward another *manacvan* came over the brow of a hill pursued by a beast as big as a rhinoceros that was covered with short horns or spines. The *manacvan* escaped into a burrow and the horned beast charged Nina and Tam. Tam sped to meet the monster. Nina was about to follow when she was seized from behind by another *manacvan* that dragged her into its den. Tam, engaged with the horned monstrosity, did not hear her scream.

As the huge beast came thundering up, Tam brought his *tulwar* down on its armor-plated head with all the strength and skill at his command.

CHAPTER 16

The Warriors of Brahm

As the *manacvan* dragged her into its dark, stinking den, Nina struggled desperately to escape. But the rope which bound her arms to her sides made her efforts ineffectual, and the kicks she managed to plant on the body of the dog-faced man did not seem to discommode him any more than if they had been fly bites.

Once inside, he threw her to the ground and swiftly bound her wrists and ankles.

He was leaning over her, his fetid breath in her face, when there sounded a low growl from a far corner of the cave, and another dog-faced creature came hurrying up. This one, a female and evidently the mate of the first, sniffed at Nina for an instant, then opened her jaws to seize her by the throat. With a quick flip of his shoulder, her mate sent her sprawling.

Snarling her rage, the female came quickly to her feet, and leaped. But this time, her strong jaws fastened on the shoulder of her mate. In an instant the cave was in an uproar. Growls, snarls and yelps were intermingled as the two snapping and tearing *manacvans* rolled over and over in mortal combat.

Mingled with the din of the two contestants, Nina then heard a mournful howling sound, and saw six more of the creatures, about a quarter grown and evidently the offspring of the two that fought, trot out from a far corner of the cave. They circled around the embattled parents, barking, snarling and snapping at the legs and bushy tails of both, indiscriminately. Then, like children mimicking their elders, a pair of them engaged in a miniature duel that was a pretty fair imitation of the major combat.

The uproar was deafening. For a time the two adult contestants seemed about evenly matched. The male was stronger, but the female was much the quicker of the two, hence able to slash him oftener with her long yellow fangs. Soon both were covered with blood from head to foot, but it was the male who was losing the larger share of his life's fluid. Presently his movements became slower—weaker.

Seeing this, the female clamped her powerful jaws on his throat, sank her fangs in, and hung on. He made violent efforts to dislodge her at first but soon grew feeble. Presently he sank to the floor on his back. Then, with a mighty heave of her shaggy head, she tore out the whole front of his throat.

Whining eagerly, now, the youngsters gathered around and lapped up the blood that gushed from the gaping wound. Then they began tearing off and devouring bits of the flesh of their male parent with their sharp little teeth. The female, after gnawing through the gristle and bone of a shoulder, tore off an arm and retired growling to a corner to devour it. The young ones swarmed over the mangled body, snapping, tearing, quarreling over choice bits.

The female took her time about finishing the arm and hand. Nina could hear her crunching the joints and cracking the bones for marrow.

Presently, she rose and slunk back across the cave. But this time, she made straight for the bound and helpless girl!

In the meantime, Tam stood in more deadly peril than he had ever been in before, as the horned and armor-plated horror charged for the second time. He had met the first charge with a sidestep and a downward stroke of his *tulwar* that would easily have split the skull of a buffalo. But the skull of this monster

was infinitely thicker, and in addition, protected by the bony plates of exceeding hardness, so his blade had only shorn away a horn and its supporting bony structure above one eye.

This time he leaped to the opposite side, and again brought down his blade with all his strength. It bit deeply into the center of the skull—so deeply that he could not disengage it, and it was wrested from his hand. But apparently it had not found the tiny brain, for the monster whirled, and again charged him with the *tulwar* imbedded in its massive head.

His sole remaining weapons consisted of the *kukrie* and three javelins. He met the charge with one of the latter, thrusting for an eye as he made his agile side-leap. The point went true to the mark, but the slender shaft snapped off, leaving it in the bleeding eye socket. Then, instead of charging past him as it had previously done, the huge beast came to a stop, and turning, slashed at him with the long, curved horn on the bridge of its nose.

So sudden and surprizing was this change of tactics on the part of the monster, that Tam had no time to leap back. Dropping the broken javelin shaft, he grasped the horn with one hand, and the hilt of his imbedded *tulwar* with the other. Then the beast tossed him.

The horn slipped from his grasp, but the *tulwar*, wrenched from the grip of the bone in which it had been imbedded, came out in his hand as he was hurled up and over the beast's bristling back. He alighted sprawling, just behind the horned tail, and scrambled to his feet, *tulwar* in hand, expecting the creature to turn instantly and attack him once more.

But, to his surprize, he heard the thunderous tread of many beasts running, mingled with the clank of arms and the shouts of warriors. At first he thought the Saivas had followed, and at last discovered him, but as they charged down the hillside in rows, twenty abreast, he saw that these were no Saivas, though they bore considerable resemblance to them. Gigantic, and four-armed, their skins instead of being pasty white were bright red in color. And they bestrode black baluchitheriums. Like the Saivas, they couched long, triple-pointed lances, and Tam saw that they were charging, not at him, but at the horned monster which had just tossed him.

It was this charge which had distracted the attention of the beast from Tam. And toward the oncoming riders it now directed the fury which the pain of its wounds had incited. With lowered head it charged straight into the bristling line of lances.

There was a shattering of stout wooden shafts as the lance points struck but did not penetrate that armored body. Then, swinging its massive head to the right and left with the motions of a rooting boar, the beast tossed and slashed open such baluchitheriums as came within its reach. In less than a minute a half dozen of the giant pachyderms lay on the ground with their bodies ripped open. Two of them had pinned their riders so they could not rise, and Tam saw the horned horror snap off and swallow the head of one of these as a bird might pluck and swallow a cherry.

Belabored with maces and *tulwars* and prodded with tridents, the monster whirled, first to the right, then to the left, goring and often disemboweling the mounts of its enemies with deadly efficiency.

One rider, who by the richness of his accoutrements and trappings appeared to be the leader or chief of the red warriors, displayed greater bravery than any of the others. While most of them attacked the

monster from the flanks or rear, he reined his mount again and again toward its front, slashing with his *tulwar* and skilfully retreating each time it charged. Presently the beast, ignoring its other enemies, singled out this particular rider with an unexpected charge. As skilfully as before, he wheeled his mount and retreated. But he had not traveled more than fifty feet when his baluchitherium stepped into a hole and pitched him over its head. He alighted on his back with a heavy thud and a clank of metal, not ten feet from where Tam stood.

Like an avenging demon, the horned monster thundered after him. It ripped open his fallen steed in passing, and then bore down on him with tremendous speed. He attempted to rise, but had evidently been injured by his fall, as he sank back helplessly to his elbows. Seeing the plight of the fallen chieftain, Tam bounded forward, directly in the path of the charging beast. As it came up to him he leaped to the left, and brought down his *tulwar* with every bit of strength and skill at his command, aiming at the deep cut which he had previously made in the skull.

The weapon struck true, and this time penetrated to twice the depth it had attained before.

As the beast hurtled past him, the blade snapped off at the hilt, but it was obvious that this time the *tulwar* had done its work. The monster stopped—attempted to whirl toward Tam. But it moved slowly—its three-toed feet dragging. For a moment it stood on wobbly, uncertain legs. Then it listed like a foundered ship, and fell over on its side, dead.

Flinging away the useless hilt of his *tulwar*, Tam went over and helped the injured red giant to rise. For a moment the chieftain leaned on his shoulder, steadying himself, while his warriors gathered solicitously around.

"By the seven great names!" exclaimed the officer, grinning down at Tam. "That was a powerful blow. I owe you my life."

"And I owe you mine," replied Tam, "so we are even. Had you not arrived when you did, this monster would have gotten the better of me."

One of the warriors had, meanwhile, been tugging at Tam's blade, imbedded in the skull. Presently it came away, and he peered at the wound for an instant.

"Indeed, my lord," he said, addressing the chieftain, "it was truly a marvelous cut, for it sheared clear through the brain! It was a stroke of which Brahm, himself, might have been proud."

"Through the brain, say you?" exclaimed the chieftain. "Why, that's unheard of. To even *reach* the brain is a feat for our strongest, and this seldom done. Who are you, Aryan, and what do you here in Brahmavarta?"

"I am no Aryan," he replied, "but come from the outer world where men call me 'Tam.' As for what I am doing in your country, I was passing through it with the Princess of Arya, whom I do not now see among you. What have you done with her?"

"From the outer world, and with the Princess of Arya? What mean you by such wild statements? Has the day-blaze got to your brain?"

"She stood here behind me when the beast first attacked," said Tam, ignoring the imputation against his sanity. "Now she has disappeared. It is as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up."

"Come, come, my friend," said the chief, patting him on the shoulder. "This ordeal has been too much for you. There was no one standing behind you when we rode up. My men and I can vouch for that. Let me give you a little wine from

my flask. Then, when you have rested and eaten, ride back to Brahmatun with us."

"I see you think me demented," said Tam. "Come with me, then, and I'll show you I'm not."

He walked back a little way, the tall chieftain striding beside him, and several of his warriors following in their wake. As he expected, he soon found Nina's small footprints and pointed them out to the red giant.

"You'll have to admit I didn't make those tracks," he said, "and neither did yon dead beast."

"By the gods on the mountain!" exclaimed the chieftain. "These *are* the tracks of a woman! But if it is Nina, why she is a goddess as well as a princess, and could easily disappear without leaving a trace."

Tam suddenly caught sight of something else. It was the track of a large bare foot, human in form, but leaving deep claw-prints which easily identified the creature that had made them. Trained woodsman that he was, there instantly came to him the solution of the mystery. Nina had told him that where one *manacvan* was, others would be found close by. She had told him, also, that these creatures were man-eaters, and of the horrible fate that awaited women and girls who fell into their clutches.

He instantly set out on the trail of the dog-faced man followed by the puzzled Brahman chieftain. The trail led directly over the brow of the hill and into a filthy, evil-smelling burrow on the other side.

Tam seized the chief's *tulwar* and plunged into the opening. At first he could see nothing in the darkness of the interior but he heard a yapping snarling sound which appeared to come from many little throats, suddenly punctuated by a thunderous growl, and followed by the rush of a large and heavy body. Dimly he saw, hurtling toward him through the gloom, one of the hideous monstrosities which Nina had called a *manacvan*. The dog-like mouth was open in an ugly snarl, and fetid saliva drooled from the foam-flecked jaws.

Tam whirled the *tulwar* in a flashing arc. The hideous thing before him flew apart, its upper half falling one way while the lower fell another. But he had not yet rid himself of his enemies, for the young *manacvans*, always eager for fresh blood, were snapping and slashing at his legs. They were, however, more annoying than deadly, and a few blows of the *tulwar* silenced their voices forever.

At the far end of the cave his eyes, now accustomed to the gloom of the interior, caught the glint of armor. With a glad cry he bounded across the bone-littered floor and caught up the slender gold-clad form of Nina. With his knife, he quickly cut her bonds, and then carried her out into the light and fresh air, where the Brahman chieftain and a number of his followers awaited him. They greeted him with shouts of acclamation as he emerged from the cave mouth with the girl in his arms. But when he stood her on her feet and they were able to see her beautiful features and insignia, the Brahmans, to a man, knelt down before her.

With a gesture that was at once imperious and friendly, she bade them arise.

"Holy priestess, illustrious princess, and bright and shining goddess of the Aryans," said the chieftain. "We, the humble warriors of the great god, Brahm, extend you his greetings and salutations, since you have seen fit to honor us by setting foot upon his territory. If there is some way that we may be of service

to you, you have but to name it and we will gladly do your bidding."

Nina smiled, and the smile was at once that of a woman and a princess.

"You may escort me to my own land of Arya if you would profit yourselves and lay up merit by serving me," she said.

"We hear and we obey, majesty," replied the chief. Then he issued a few swift orders to his men. Two of them quickly dismounted and led their huge beasts up to where Tam and Nina stood. After helping the two into the saddles, they retired to the rear ranks, each clutching a stirrup of one of his fellows.

Placing himself at the head of the column, the chief then gave the order to advance. Directly behind him, riding side by side in saddles of such great size that they were made to look almost like children by comparison, rode Tam and Nina. Behind them came the giant red warriors, riding by twos.

All that day, and until the red light of evening replaced the blue-white day blaze, they rode thus without further adventure. Then the giant red warriors made camp for the night. Nina was given the chief's tent and was regaled with the finest food the knapsacks of the Brahmans afforded. Tam took pot luck with the others, and when the meal had ended, stretched out with them around the fire. With two of the giant warriors standing guard over her tent, he felt no apprehension for her safety, and soon fell asleep.

In the orange glow of dawn the party breakfasted, broke camp, and set out once more. The shadows had grown perpendicular and the day blaze was at its hottest when Tam saw, far ahead of them, the heaving, scintillating bosom of a broad river spanned by a great arched bridge. Beyond the river a series of gray, stony bluffs supported much verdure.

"The River Ind," cried Nina, "and beyond it my own dear country of Arya."

Swiftly the huge beasts carried them to the foot of the bridge. Here a ringing challenge from a group of red bridge guards was quickly answered by the chief of the red warriors.

"If you would cross the bridge," said the guard, "let me see your passports."

"We have no need for passports," replied the chief, "as we form a guard of honor for the great goddess, Nina, who is returning to her capital."

"Girl or goddess," replied the guard, doggedly, "she can neither leave this country nor enter Arya without the proper papers."

"Dolt!" thundered the chief of the warriors. "For Brahm or Nina there are no such things as passports. Now will you let us pass, oaf, or shall we ride you down?"

"Pass, then," replied the surly guard, "as it seems that I can not do otherwise than permit you to break the law."

With the thunder of many huge hoofs on the plank flooring, the cavalcade galloped across the bridge. At the other end they were brought to a halt by a white man of about Tam's size and build, who wore the insignia and steel armor of Arya.

"Your passports, please," he demanded politely of the chief.

For answer, that individual reined his mount to one side, revealing to the eyes of the startled guard the gold-clad form of his young ruler. Swiftly, he sank to his knees as did those other Aryan soldiers who stood nearby awaiting his orders.

"Arise, men of Arya," said the princess, sweetly. "These brave warriors of Brahm have volunteered to escort me to my capital. You will therefore let them pass."

"Harkening and obedience, majesty,"

replied the officer of her guard. At a wave of his hand the men stepped aside and stood respectfully at salute while the cavalcade passed through.

It was late that evening when, tinted by the scarlet light of the waning day, the magnificent towers, turrets and battlements of Aryatun, the beautiful, were revealed to the startled eyes of Tam as they rounded a sharp curve on the road.

"My capital," said Nina. "Is it not lovely?"

"It's magnificent," Tam replied, as his eyes drank in the grandeur of the scene.

CHAPTER 17

An Unexpected Reception

On the day following their enslavement by Vishnu, Major Evans and his party, after having partaken of their frugal breakfast, were promptly marched back to the building site where they had been so industriously and laboriously shaping stone the day before under the supervision of their gigantic blue overseers.

On the way over, no word passed between the major and his friend, Doctor Green, of the plan of escape which they had formulated the night before. Nor did Yusuf, the Panthan, nor Dhava, the Aryan, show by word or gesture that any such plot was afoot, though they had been taken into the full confidence of the two Americans.

When they reached the place they were detailed to the various posts which they had occupied on the previous day, and were soon hard at work. Then it was that the doctor and Dhava started work on the plan which the major's brain had originated, but which, because of his ignorance of the language, he was unable at this time to assist in carrying out.

The fellow who worked next to the doctor was a four-armed blue giant, once a soldier of Vishnu, but condemned to hard labor for insubordination. It was easy to see that this individual, who had formerly led the carefree life of a warrior, was far from satisfied with his lot. Speaking quietly, so he might not be overheard by one of the overseers, the doctor asked him if he would like his freedom.

"I can think of nothing I should like better," replied the giant, "but there is no hope."

"You fellows are entirely too docile," said the doctor. "All you lack is strong leadership. This we can supply you in the person of Major Evans, whose business it is to lead warriors."

"Vouchsafe me a leader, a weapon, and but one chance in ten to fight through, and I am your man," said the giant.

"You shall have all three, and soon," replied the doctor. "At the cry: 'For Nina!' you will seize your maul or chisel, or a granite fragment, or whatever weapon or tool may lie near your hand, and attack your overseer, depriving him of his weapons and being ready to follow the white officer in a break for liberty. The time will be just before nightfall, so spread the word, making sure that you do not disclose your plans to any not in sympathy with the cause. Then await the signal, and be ready to act when it is given."

All through the day there was much buzzing of seemingly idle conversation among the slaves. The overseers stood listlessly about, only noting that the workers were performing their tasks with a little more vim than usual, and therefore condoning the extra conversational activity. Busiest of all in spreading the word were the doctor and Dhava. While he hewed and polished the immense triangular blocks of blue stone the major, though he understood not a word of the conversation, was well pleased by the ap-

parent favor with which his plan was being received.

Shortly after the slaves had eaten their noon meal a number of aged and richly attired blue giants came to the building site and summoned the major and doctor. Accompanying them were several slaves who carried in a shallow cushioned box, suspended from two poles, the arms and ammunition belts and pouches which the Vaishnavas had taken from the major's party.

These, thought the major, must be the sages of Vishnu who had been ordered to investigate the weapons which were hitherto unknown in Iramatri, and which had caused such consternation among the Vaishnavan warriors. He turned to the doctor.

"Let's try to stall them off until just before nightfall," he said. "Then we'll grab our weapons, shout the war cry, and be all set to fight our way out."

"Good idea," replied the scientist. "We'll do our best to hold them until evening."

And so, during the long afternoon, the sages of Vishnu listened first to a long dissertation on the origin of gunpowder and the various chemical constituents used in its manufacture. Then they were regaled with a historical account of the various weapons in which gunpowder had been used through mediæval times. But by the time the doctor had come down to the match-lock and arquebus, the advent of the scarlet evening glow announced the coming of darkness, and the moment for which the slaves had been waiting all day had arrived.

The major looked significantly at the doctor who, in turn, flashed a comprehensive glance at Dhava and Yusuf. Then the four, as if impelled by a single impulse, leaped for the firearms which lay so tantilizingly near. So unexpected was their move that the accomplishment of the thing was ridiculously easy. The major whose hand first fell on his forty-five Colt six-shooter leveled it in time to bring down two giant blue guards who, with upraised *tulwars* had sprung forward to cut them down. At sight of the sudden and terrible deaths wrought by these weapons the sages of Vishnu abandoned their dignity and fled incontinently.

"For Nina!" shouted the doctor, at the top of his voice.

"For Nina!" echoed his three companions. And the war cry was picked up and roared by a thousand throats. Slaves grabbed their working tools—mauls, chisels, wedges, saws, and such granite fragments as were small enough to hurl yet large enough to do injury. A few moments, and all the guards and overseers lay dead on the ground, their weapons stripped from them and appropriated by the howling, blood-crazed slaves.

Then it was that Major Evans, with Doctor Green interpreting his commands and his small party now fully armed with rifles and pistols, led the assault upon that portion of the wall which stood between them and freedom. To the slaves, schooled in the cutting and shaping of stone, it was but the work of a few moments to open a breach through which two men could pass abreast. Then the major, the first to enter, led his motley army out into the jungle which fringed the city walls.

There was a thunderous roar of hoofs mingled with the shouts of warriors as the last few slaves hurried through the breach, for the alarm had been given at the palace and Vishnu did not propose to permit them to escape thus easily. But the huge baluchitheriums were unable to pass through the low breach which had been made in the wall, nor were they able to scale it, so their riders were compelled to turn them about and dash for the nearest

city gate before they could even begin to take up the pursuit.

In the meantime darkness had fallen—the complete inky darkness of early evening in Iramatri—so that the escaped slaves melted away into the jungle like so many wraiths.

MAJOR EVANS had traveled by day and by night in all the jungles of the upper earth, but in none of them had he ever encountered such tremendous and terrific beasts as those that wandered here after nightfall. With the skill of a trained woodsman, he did his best to keep his party out of the way of the great hunting carnivores. But the long column of men strung out behind him covered too much territory to make this possible. Thrice some huge jungle flesh-eater cut through the line in the blackness, and each time a man was lost.

Like his princess, Dhava carried one of the luminous-faced bow-shaped mechanisms, one indicator of which pointed always toward Aryatun. And barring such detours as they were forced to make to avoid roving carnivores and pass around insurmountable obstacles, the major kept his party traveling toward that city.

The advent of the violet-silver night light which corresponded to moonlight was a great help to them, but also a source of danger, as they would the more readily be revealed to the pursuing Vaishnavas should they come within sight of them.

As Vaishnavarta was east of the River Ind, they were not forced to cross this, nor any other stream of formidable size, in order to reach Arya. After they had passed the Vaishnavarta-Arya border, which was shortly after daybreak, the major divided his motley army into small units, which he advised to scatter, each unit from then on looking out for itself. Then he and his three companions, Doctor Green, Yusuf and Dhava, struck out boldly for the Vaishnatun-Aryatun paved road, and soon came to one of the caravanserais which Arya maintained for her soldiers and for travelers within her borders. They were promptly placed under arrest, but this they had expected, and yielded their weapons without offering any resistance.

Although Dhava was unable to convince the commander of the border guards that they were innocent of any designs on the empire, he did persuade him that they were much in need of food and a few hours' rest, and that this kindness to them might be the means of his advancement when it should come to the ears of the princess. In the meantime, riding mammoths were sent for, and the prisoners were thus enabled to travel on to Aryatun in as much comfort as any captives might expect .

When they reached the capital late that evening they were placed in one of the palace rooms, ostensibly guests, but actually prisoners.

"What the devil do they mean?" fumed the major. "Here we risked our lives in order to try to rescue their princess, and they treat us like a bunch of convicts. Do you hear those guards pacing outside our door?"

"I think they'll change their attitude, once we've explained things to the proper authorities," said the doctor. "I'll ask Dhava what he makes of it."

For some time the scientist held converse with Dhava in the Aryan tongue. Then he turned to the major.

"I'm afraid we're in for it," he said. "Dhava doesn't hold out much hope. We've run into a bit of family politics here that rather puts us on the spot. Nina, it seems, has a cousin who is an aspirant for her throne—would, in fact, be next

in line for it in case of her demise or departure for a certain length of time. And this cousin's father, Nina's uncle, is ruler, *pro tem.*, while she's away. This amiable chap, whose name is Nirgo, likes the job of bossing Arya. He wouldn't be at all averse to seeing his daughter, Bina, ruling in Nina's place and assuming her name and title."

"That does tangle things up a bit, doesn't it?" agreed the major. "But what can we do about it?"

"We'll have to follow through as planned," replied the scientist, "and tell our story to this Nirgo. Of course he'll pretend not to believe it. His actions in keeping us prisoner show that. Our only chance is that some of Nina's loyal subjects may hear and believe our story—then force his hand. In this event he'll be compelled to treat us as honored guests, and to equip a powerful expedition against the Saivas for the rescue of the princess."

Servants brought them food and drink that evening, but much to their surprize, Nirgo did not send for them. Evidently he had heard their story from the lips of the officer of the border guard who had captured them, and was deciding whether or not he should grant them an audience at all.

It was not until the morrow, when the day-blaze had reached the meridian, that their door was flung open by an officer of the palace guard and the four men were conducted through a maze of hallways and passageways to a small audience chamber.

Seated on a throne which stood on a daïs at one end of the chamber was a red-nosed, beetle-browed man of immense girth. He was richly robed in imperial purple and wore a dagger and *tulwar*, both of which had elaborately jeweled hilts. Resting slightly askew on his bullet head was a golden crown in which many precious stones blazed and sparkled. His pudgy fingers, so laden with rings as to be almost invisible, were interlaced over his immense paunch, which he cradled in his lap as tenderly as ever a mother held her first-born infant.

It was significant that, except for the two guards who stood on either side of the throne, he was alone.

As the four men were brought before him, he looked at them appraisingly for a moment, then interrogated the officer of the guard:

"Who are these low creatures?"

"One calls himself 'Dhava, Captain of the Bodyguard of Princess Nina.' The others, though two of them have the look of Aryans, claim to be men of the outer world who saw our princess captured by the Saivas and followed to rescue her."

"What an absurd story," sneered the figure on the throne. "But of course they might invent fictions for officers of the guard, reserving the truth for the ears of the provisional maharaja, alone. We are kindly disposed toward them, and will give them the opportunity to tell us the truth."

"You have heard the benevolent words of His Imperial Majesty," thundered the officer. "Now choose your spokesman, tell him your story, and be sure that you speak truth, for otherwise it will go hard with you."

Doctor Green translated for the major. "What will we tell the old buzzard?" he asked. "Evidently he's dead set against hearing the truth."

"Why, tell him the truth anyway, and be damned to him," replied the major, hotly. "There are six guards and an officer present who will hear it, and among

them there is almost sure to be one man loyal to the princess. Then, let's see him keep us in jail any longer, or order us executed."

"Guess you're right," said the doctor. "There's nothing to be gained, that I can see, by lying just to please him. In any event, we know too much to suit him, and that means taps for us."

"Cease talking in your strange tongue, and tell the truth to His Imperial Majesty," warned the officer.

The doctor accordingly began at the beginning, and told his story completely and truthfully. He noticed that the beetling brows of Nirgo contracted more and more as he proceeded with the narrative, and that by the time he had finished, the thick imperial lips were pursed in a manner that boded no good for the prisoners.

"So!" roared Nirgo, when he had finished. "You had the effrontery to lie to us, after all!" He clapped his fat hands.

Instantly there burst into the room fully two score warriors, who had evidently been awaiting this signal. Eleven of them carried gags and thongs, and in a trice, every man who had occupied the room a moment before except the bloated monstrosity on the throne, was bound and gagged. The guards and the officer were also deprived of their weapons.

Nirgo waved his hand, and the four men of the major's party were led away. After traversing a number of corridors and hallways they descended a circular stairway cut from stone. Down, down they went, until it seemed that the palace must be at least a mile above them. The air grew damp and musty, moisture trickled from the slimy walls, and the dim oil lamps, set in niches at regular intervals along the way, added to the stench with their carbon-laden smoke.

At length they came to the bottom of the shaft and were led across an uneven slimy floor, covered with moldering human bones, to a wall from which depended a number of thick rusty chains. At the ends of these dangled strong iron collars. From one chain there hung a festering corpse, and from another, a whitening skeleton. Bones were scattered everywhere.

An iron collar was clamped around the neck of each prisoner and fastened with a padlock. Then the bonds and gags were removed.

"I have the honor to inform you," said one of the warriors, "of a decree by His Imperial Majesty, Nirgo of Arya. If any of you so much as mention his past adventures, either to one another, or to a guard or attendant, his tongue will be torn out by the roots, grilled and forcibly fed to him."

With this, the warriors turned and clanked away, leaving the prisoners there in the flickering yellow light, sickened by the charnel stench of moldering bones and festering bodies, and unable either to stand up or lie down because of the shortness of their collar chains.

SOME hours later, an old and toothless guard brought them rye cakes and water. The major noticed a bunch of keys swinging from his belt, and from the size of the majority of them, surmised that they fitted the collar locks. If he could but get his hands on that jailer!

They sipped their water, but were unable to eat the hard and nearly tasteless cakes because of the nausea induced by their horrible surroundings.

Seeing this, the guard grinned toothlessly.

"You do not want this poor fare, now," he said, "but in a short while you will devour it eagerly, and beg for more. Soon

you will become very thin. Then you will get like that," pointing to the cadaver, "like that," indicating the moldering skeleton, "and at last like these," with a sweep of his hand toward the bones that littered the floor.

"What a cheerful little ray of sunshine you turned out to be!" growled the doctor.

For answer, the guard grinned, displaying his withered, blue-white gums, and departed, cackling horribly.

Shortly thereafter, they heard the clank of armored men descending the spiral stairway. Then there marched into the room the bound and gagged guards who had conducted them into the presence of Nirgo, and the two who had stood on either side of the throne, each between two warriors. Behind the procession strode a tall masked man, bearing across his shoulder an immense, two-handed *tulwar*.

The bound and gagged guards were lined up in a row before the prisoners chained to the wall. Then the warriors stepped back, and the masked giant with the two-handed *tulwar* came forward. Lowering it, he carefully tested its keenness with his thumb. Apparently not quite satisfied, he drew a stone from his belt-pouch and carefully whetted a part of the blade. Again he tested it with his thumb, then plucked a hair from beneath his helmet and drew it along the edge. It was instantly shorn in two.

Replacing the stone in his belt-pouch, he stood up and began whirling the long keen blade above his head until it formed a flashing, shimmering circle. Slowly he moved toward the line of bound and gagged men. Suddenly the head of the first flew from his shoulders. For an instant the body maintained its erect posture, a little fountain of blood spouting upward from the severed neck. Then it slumped to the floor.

Scarcely had the first body fallen ere the second prisoner met the fate of the first. Then, one by one, the shimmering blade removed head after head, until there lay on the floor, seven gory heads and seven headless corpses.

The blood-spattered executioner paused, leaning on his dripping blade, and gazing at the four prisoners chained to the wall.

"It is dangerous," he said, "to know too much, and trebly dangerous to talk too much. Thus endeth the lesson."

For a moment, the four chained prisoners caught the glitter of his eyes through the slits of the hideous death-mask he wore. Then he turned, shouldered his immense blade, and marched away, followed by the warriors.

The heads and bodies were left, undisturbed, where they had fallen.

CHAPTER 18

The Treachery of Nirgo

As Tam and Nina rode side by side on the huge baluchutheriums with the beautiful city of Aryatun looming before them in the scarlet light of the waning day, and the troop of four-armed red giants forming a guard of honor behind them, there suddenly charged out at them from both sides of the road, a host of Aryan warriors mounted on mammoths.

"What's this?" asked Tam. "Are your own warriors attacking you?"

"Treachery!" cried Nina. "They wear the livery of my uncle, Nirgo."

Tam whipped out his *tulwar*, parried a blow from the foremost rider, and split him from crown to groin. The riderless mammoth then shouldered past, and another mounted warrior took the place

of the first. Tam served him in like manner, and waited for a third. This was easy, compared to fighting the gigantic Saivas, he thought.

As he engaged the third man, he noticed that the red giants, hopelessly outnumbered by the attacking Aryans, and evidently believing they had been purposely led into a trap by Tam and Nina, had turned their steeds and were galloping back down the highway. This left only Tam and Nina to fight it out against fully two hundred mounted warriors. And Nina was unarmed.

Splitting the head of his third adversary, Tam reined his huge mount up beside her, and grasping her around the waist, set her on his saddle bow. Then, with *tulwar* slashing to the right and left, he spurred his steed forward, attempting to cut his way through the circle of attackers. But it was hopeless. The mammoths now stood shoulder to shoulder, and beyond them the charging baluchitherium could not pass.

Flailing *tulwars* and maces hemmed him in. As fast as he could strike down one warrior, another leaped in to take his place.

Someone threw a mace. It struck Tam's right elbow, numbing his arm. He strove to hold his *tulwar* but a blow from the warrior in front of him sent it hurtling from his grasp.

A soldier leaped at him from behind, flinging a heavy thong around his arms and pinioning them to his sides. Then both he and Nina were dragged from the saddle.

The girl was placed in a *howdah,* where two powerful females, already installed, saw to it that she did not show her face. Tam, bound hand and foot, was thrown across the neck of a mammoth like a sack of meal, the driver, sitting just behind him and carelessly holding him in place while he directed the great beast. When they drew close to the city gates a coarse cloth was rolled around him, hiding him completely and also shutting out his vision of what went on around him.

He heard the challenge of the sentries, and the opening of the city gates before the cavalcade filed in. Then he judged by the sounds and motions that the beast which carried him was threading numerous thorofares. Presently he was lowered to the shoulders of four men, carried up a flight of steps, and into a building where the sandals of the men clattered on the hard tiles. Presently the men who carried him stopped and lowered him to the floor. Then they unrolled him from the bundle of cloth in which he had been wrapped and jerked him to his feet.

Seated on a throne on a daïs before him, Tam saw a red-nosed, beetle-browed and extremely corpulent individual. A short distance from him he saw Nina, who had been stripped of her golden armor and insignia and now wore a soft clinging garment of white material, standing between two guards. She was looking defiantly up at the bloated figure on the throne—her eyes flashing.

"And so, uncle, you stoop at last to treason," she cried. "Do you think my people will permit you to go through with this?"

"They do not know," wheezed the fat one on the throne. "My daughter Bina is as near like you as if she had been your twin. The priests will gladly accept her when your allotted time for absence is up. She will be Nina, Princess-Goddess of Arya. And you—why you will be but dust unless you choose to accept my terms."

"Terms! I make terms with you? Absurd!"

"Then you do not care to hear them?"

"No."

"Very well. I promise you that a few days' confinement, such as I have prepared for you will make you quite eager to hear them—and to accept. As for this, your champion, called the Son of the White Tiger, who it is said has come to fulfil a prophecy, he will never live to accomplish it. There will be confinement for him, also, in the dungeon where his sire and three friends are already imprisoned—confinement and a slow, withering death, during which he will have time to reflect that it is always best to leave the fulfilment of prophecies to the prophets."

"You would dare do this, beast?"

"For the accomplishment of my desires and a throne for Bina I would dare anything. Of course if, at the end of a few days, you decide to hear and accede to my terms, you may be in time to save the life of this youth."

Tam had heard more than enough to make his blood boil. Standing between two guards with his arms bound behind him, he fumed impotently. Suddenly throwing all discretion to the winds, and sure that his action could bring naught but sudden death, he whirled to the right, then to the left, flinging his guards from him with such force that both crashed to the floor. Then he leaped up on the daïs, and with all the force he could muster, planted one foot in the puffy and tenderly nurtured midriff of the purple-clad potentate.

With a grunt and a moan, the usurper bounced from his throne and collapsed on the daïs. Tam raised his foot for another kick, but it never landed. For at that instant, something collided with the back of his head. There was a brief instant of whirling, multi-hued stellar constellations, followed by oblivion.

SOME time later, he had no means of knowing how long, Tam came to his senses with the feeling that he was strangling. Automatically, his hand went to his neck, where he felt a thick metal collar. He tugged at the thing, and finding that he could not loosen it, sat up, whereupon the strangling sensation disappeared. Then he noticed that there was, impinging on his olfactory nerves, a most horrible and disgusting stench. And he began to be conscious that his head was aching, almost unbearably.

He opened his eyes. In a dim and flickering yellow light cast by a sputtering oil lamp set in a niche in the wall at some distance from him, he saw a corpse, its neck encircled by a collar like the one he was wearing, sagging from a thick rusty chain attached to the wall. The cadaver was quite obviously in an advanced state of putrefaction, and its festering eyes stared at him sightlessly in a manner that made him shudder.

Beyond the corpse, Tam saw a skeleton hanging by a chain and collar. Slowly, he turned his aching head. Lying on the bone-littered floor in front of him he saw seven headless bodies, with the severed heads scattered around them. Turning still further, he gave a start of surprize, for chained to the wall on the other side of him was a living human being. And beyond him were three others, similarly fettered.

The man nearest him smiled.

"You're Tam, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes. And you?"

"I'm your father," was the unexpected answer.

"My father!" It was some time before Tam could realize the magnitude of this statement. The elder man extended his arms, and the youth moved toward them, but was jerked up short by his chain,

which was contrived too cunningly to permit adjacent prisoners even the touch of hands.

"I'm glad to see you, my father," said Tam.

"And I you, son," replied the major, a huskiness suddenly creeping into his voice, "even though it's rather a messy place to meet in. But I've been in worse. Have you?"

"Yes, once," replied Tam, remembering the Black Pit of the Saivas.

"Meet my friends who have recently been sharing my good and bad fortunes," said the major. "The gentleman next me with the flaming beard is Doctor Green, a scientist who is continually poking about looking for old bones and stones, thereby getting himself and his friends into a lot of trouble."

"Glad to meet you, lad," said the doctor, "but sorry to find you here."

Tam acknowledged, and the major continued:

"Next on my right is Yusuf, who has been with me in many a tight place. A most execrable liar, and a beautiful scrapper. Give him a *charay* and a cause, and he'll carve his way out of almost any situation.

"Next beyond Yusuf, is Dhava, the Aryan. He can't understand me fully, as he only knows a little English, but you can rely on him. He was captain of Nina's bodyguard, and went down fighting for her. Fortunately, his helmet saved him from mortal injury, and the doctor and I came along in time to revive him."

"Any man who has fought for Nina is my good friend," said Tam.

"So? It has come to that? Well, I don't blame you, son. She's a pippin."

The major settled down with his back against the wall, thoughtfully stuffed his pipe and lit it. Tam also leaned back and tenderly caressed the lump on his head.

"Where's Nina now?" asked the major, presently.

"Nirgo has her imprisoned, somewhere in the palace, I suppose," replied Tam. "He threatened her, the fat toad! Said something about some terms of his which she would be glad to meet, within three or four days, and announced his intention of establishing his daughter, Bina, on her throne."

"So much our friend Dhava surmised. And moreover, he tells us that if but one man could escape and get word to one of the loyal followers of the Princess, Nirgo and his confederates would soon be where we are, with the prospect of losing their heads. He says that the only men left alive who know of our presence here, wear the marks of Nirgo."

"The marks of Nirgo? Where do they wear them, and what are they like?"

"The minions of each royal family wear the coat of arms of that family tattooed on the backs of their hands and in miniature on their ear lobes. Nirgo's symbol is the head of a mammoth surmounted by a gold crown with the inscription: 'The strength to rule.' "

"And Nina's followers. What of them?"

"They are similarly tattooed, but with the symbol of the goddess, Nina, the golden disc of the sun above the silver crescent of the moon, set on a uræus, and below the words: 'Jagan Mata,' which, I am told, mean: 'Mother of the World.' "

"Then," said Tam, "it is plain that we must get out of here, somehow, and tell our story to men who wear this symbol, avoiding or finding the means to silence those who wear the mammoth's head emblem."

"I have noticed," said the major, "that our jailer is tattooed with the symbol of Nirgo."

"Our jailer?"

"The old dotard who brings our food, and who also carries the keys which would undoubtedly unlock these collars. If I could but get my hands on him! But he's canny enough to keep well out of reach."

"Perhaps I can find a way," said Tam.

He looked at his heavy chain speculatively, and at the ring, fastened to an immense rusty pin cemented into the solid stone wall, to which it was attached. Turning, he set his feet against the wall, and gripping the chain with both hands, tugged with all his might. But it would not give even a fraction of an inch.

"How soon do you expect this jailer?" he asked.

"It is nearly time for him to bring the food and water," said his father, "unless he should change his schedule."

Tam studied the links of the chain. Each link formed a twisted figure eight, but the rings were only bent together, not welded. By holding two links center to center, he was able to employ one as a lever against the other. He twisted with all his might. One circle of the figure eight bent a little. Again he gave it a mighty twist, and found that he was able to slip the links apart. He was free!

Faltering footsteps sounded on the stairway.

"Look out!" called the major in a hoarse whisper. "The jailer is coming!"

Tam squatted back against the wall, holding his chain so the two severed ends met. In came an old man bearing a tray of rye cakes and stone mugs, and a stone water bottle.

"By the seven heads of the first Naga," he cackled. "I'll warrant ye eat the cakes this time, stench or no stench." Then he observed Tam. "What's this? A new prisoner, by the bones of Krishna! And only a boy. No doubt his stomach will be quite delicate because of his neighbor on the right."

He tossed a rye cake into the filth at Tam's feet, took a mug from the tray, and reached for the water bottle.

Tam watched him with tensed muscles. Like a tiger, he had waited for just the right moment, and like a tiger he now sprang straight at his mocking jailer. But it seemed that the old fellow was not so easily taken off his guard. With a grin that displayed his blue-white, toothless gums, he whipped a dagger from his belt and met the charge of the unarmed youth.

NINA was astounded at the fearlessness of Tam when he shook his two guards from him and mounted the daïs to plant his foot in the huge soft paunch of Nirgo. She screamed a warning when one of the guards, recovering his balance, unhooked a mace from his belt, and leaping up behind Tam, brought it down on the back of his head.

But her warning came too late. Tam toppled from the daïs, and lay senseless on the floor below with one guard standing over him awaiting the command to beat out his brains, while the other helped the gasping and groaning usurper back to the throne. It was some time before Nirgo was able to speak.

"Slay him not," he wheezed, "but chain him in the dungeon with the others from the outer earth. He would die too easily this way. We must have time to devise a death, lingering and horrible, which will in some measure compensate for the magnitude of his crime."

The two guards caught up the uncon-

scious Tam, one by his shoulders, the other by his feet, and carried him out.

"And now," said Nirgo, turning toward Nina and once more composing his pudgy hands over his great belly, "we will attend to your case."

"Speak not of my case, but rather of this young man's," said Nina. "Do you mean to slay him?"

"Assuredly," replied Nirgo. "You saw what he did. Think you that we would permit any man to live after he had thus attempted our life? He shall die a death of lingering agony."

"Slay him," said Nina, with flashing eyes, "and I will promise you a death ten times as painful as his, with the curse of Nina to follow you to the nether world."

For a moment the usurper quaked on his throne. The temporal powers of Nina he did not fear, for he was in control, but the curse of the great goddess was something else. It could follow a man into the nether world, drive his wandering spirit into a worm, a slug, or some other low organism, and cause him to live a million lowly and harassed lives before he could once more become even a man of the lowest order. Then he remembered that if his plans worked, his daughter Bina would soon be Princess-Goddess. She would then become the temporal Nina, with the power to undo the curse. He grinned a porcine grin.

"I am in command here," he said. "As for your curse, I do not fear it. My daughter will see that the blessings of the Jagan Mata descend upon me throughout life, and follow me in death. As for this youth, whose life you seem to value so highly, it may be that I will permit him to live—grant him life because my dear young niece desires that he be spared. Of course I shall expect my niece, in this event, to be amenable to certain suggestions which I will make to her, touching her future welfare."

"You will not slay him," said Nina. "You dare not. Nor will I temporize with you."

"Ha! We shall see!" He scowled beneath his beetling brows. "To the cage with her, guards."

Nina's two guards, after gagging her and carefully muffling her so that she would not be recognized, hurried her from the room. After threading numerous corridors and descending a stairway with her, they thrust her into a place of foul and acrid odors. As they removed her gag and hoodwink, she tried to remember where that horrible scent had assailed her nostrils before.

A gate closed with a metallic clank. She opened her eyes, and with the memory of that odor came the picture which had eluded her. But in this case, the picture was real. She was standing on a foul, straw-littered floor in the middle of one compartment of a double cage. Between her and the other compartment was a locked door, with several bars set on each side of it to form a partition. And in the other compartment, sniffing and reaching toward her through those bars was a *manacvan,* a huge and hideous dog-faced man, the source of the odor she had smelled once before when dragged into its malodorous burrow by one of these foul creatures.

Instinctively, she shrank away from the hairy-faced, brush-tailed monster that reached for her. A faintness assailed her, and she leaned against the bars farthest from the center of the cage.

The *manacvan* was making little whining noises, evidently intended to be conciliatory. But she knew too well the fate of women and girls who fell into

the clutches of these monsters, to be deceived by such manifestations.

For moments or hours, she knew not which, she clung there to the bars, unwilling even to sit down in the foul litter that covered the cage floor. Then she heard a door open, and saw the portly form of her uncle squeeze through. He was followed by a single, hunchbacked figure, behind whom the door swung shut.

The two men advanced toward the cage, the former with a ponderous, duck-like waddle, the latter shuffling behind him with a sheepish, hang-dog gait.

Nirgo paused before the half-fainting girl. Beside him, gaping at her with a vacant, idiotic expression, was his companion.

The youth, for he appeared to be in his early twenties, was not only hunchbacked, but malformed in nearly every feature. His ears were large, and the tips flopped downward like those of a hound. His eyes pressed outward as if about to pop from his head, and his hare-lip drooped disconsolately over the irregular yellow fangs which answered him for teeth. His chest was sunken, his belly protruded, and his hands and limbs were gnarled and twisted. The vacant, imbecile stare with which he regarded Nina showed that he had a mind which matched his twisted body.

"Perhaps you don't remember your cousin, Virgo," wheezed her uncle. "Virgo, however, remembers you—don't you, Virgo? He has always admired you from afar—loved you with a love that is pure and honorable—haven't you, Virgo?"

The hunchback mumbled something between his yellow snags of teeth which Nirgo evidently interpreted as: "Yes."

"In many ways, fortune has frowned on Virgo," continued Nirgo. "But in one thing has he been fortunate—that is in having me for a father. He is the apple of my eye, and I have always given him everything he wanted—within reason—haven't I, Virgo?"

Again the malformed idiot gargled an inarticulate answer—an animal-like sound deep in his throat, which his father appeared to understand.

"As I have said," Nirgo went on, "I have always given my only son everything within reason that his heart desired. He wants to marry his fair cousin, and I can't see anything unreasonable about that. But of course he doesn't want an unwilling bride—a spitfire to be dragged to the bridal couch and subdued like a tigress. Nor should I care to see him take an unwilling bride. I have therefore arranged an alternative."

He pointed to the dog-faced man, still reaching through the bars toward Nina, panting with tongue protruding and slaver dripping from his immense jowls.

"You will name your choice, and quickly," continued Nirgo, "for some things have occurred which make it imperative that we get this matter over and done with at once. I had thought to grant you a few days to think it over—here—but now even that may not be. You must decide at once. Promise that you will become Virgo's dutiful and obedient bride now, or I will pull this lever which opens the door between the two compartments of your cage.

"Which shall it be? Virgo, or the *manacvan?*"

Horror stricken, Nina clutched desperately at the bars of the cage, and prayed that she might not betray her fear by fainting. Presently she steadied herself, released her hold of the bars, and walked to the front of the cage where her uncle and cousin stood: As she walked, she slowly formed a desperate plan.

Coming before Nirgo, she said, sweetly:

"Why, uncle, You should have told me in the first place that you wished me to marry my cousin, instead of bringing me here to threaten me with the *manacvan?* Did you think it would be necessary to——"

While she was speaking, she had reached through the bars and arranged a buckle on Nirgo's cloak as if she would wheedle him. Softly, her hand had dropped to the jeweled hilt of his *tulwar.* Now she whipped it from its sheath, swung it aloft, and brought it down on the head of the usurper.

Nirgo fell to the floor, blood streaming down over his face. But Virgo, the idiot, with a scowl like that of a petulant child, as if he had but half understood what had taken place and was yet annoyed by it, leaped to the lever which his father had previously indicated, and pulled it as far as it would go.

Instantly, the door between the cages flew wide open.

With an eager whine, the *manacvan* leaped through and charged straight for the horrified girl, while the idiot who had released him jumped up and down with ape-like gestures, laughing uproariously.

Did Tam escape from the dungeon in time to save Nina? Read the answer to this, and the smashing denouement that follows in the concluding installment of this story, which will appear in the next, the December WEIRD TALES, on sale November 1

JUNGLE FEUD

By ALICE I'ANSON

On the shore of a lake that has long been dry
The battle raged: it was eye for eye
And tooth for tooth: it was live or die!

There were blows to take; there were blows to give;
And the weak had a sorry chance to live
In the fierce old days of the Primitive!

When the "saber-tooth" tiger crunched his food,
And the giant sloth at the branches chewed,
And the black wolf suckled her grisly brood,

We fought while the sun blazed overhead,
We fought till the moon rose up, blood-red,
Till one was blinded, and one was dead!

It was tooth for tooth: it was eye for eye;
But the wolf and the tiger passed us by:
We were Men in the Making . . . you and I!

Doom Around the Corner

By WILFRED BRANCH TALMAN

A peculiar little story of a man whose belief in fairies and genii persisted in modern life

ALL of Mr. Thomas Drumlin's acquaintances, had he possessed any, would have said that he was in a rut. Drumlin even had some suspicion of it himself, and so, even if the only persons with whom he came in contact refrained from calling it to his attention because they were in a rut themselves, he did not think them remiss for not warning him.

The chief reason for Drumlin being in a rut was his latent curiosity. Perhaps it was because he was lazy, or perchance it was only because he had such a vicarious imagination that his curiosity remained latent until the night that he heard the spirit singing.

In the dusty back room of a factory tucked away in a corner of New York City, Drumlin found little to be curious about except the sums of certain columns of figures that confronted him daily as he sat on a high stool. Any questions that did occur to his mind about how objects changed in appearance, or why it became dark at night, or why it rained on certain days and not on others could be easily solved by Drumlin in his imagination, without recourse to natural science. There was little need, he felt, for sticking one's nose into a book, or running from one end of the earth to another when the fairies and genii that he had been taught to believe in during a more adventurous childhood could be regarded as the agents of nearly everything that happened.

So that when he climbed down from his stool late every afternoon to follow hundreds of others like himself into a cavern where stuffy trains ran underground and under rivers, it is not to be wondered at that Drumlin, not being at all inquisitive about transportation problems or the sources of motive power, thought (if, indeed, he bothered to consider it) that the subway coach in which he clung to a strap was a chariot drawn by some red-eyed underworld dragon.

He always took the same route from the subway to his furnished room—four hundred and twenty steps straight ahead to the grocery store on the corner, and then one hundred and two paces, turning to the right when he had left the store, to the door of the house where he lived. Drumlin had gone home by another route once, but it was twenty-nine steps further, and no grocery store along the way.

There was another corner just a few paces beyond his door, but Drumlin had never seen around it. To go that far out of his way had never occurred to him, and he must have known that around that corner would be only another street, probably just like the one he lived on, and people walking to and fro in the course of business or pleasure. One corner in a city was to him the same as another.

Touching a match to his diminutive gas stove, Drumlin each night would prepare himself a little supper, wash his dishes, and perhaps straighten up a few things about the room that his landlady had neglected. Then he would sit before his one narrow window, opening to the rear of the house, and gaze out—not because there was much to see outside, or anything he cared to look at, but because looking out of a window seemed to allow greater breadth for meditation,

Then Drumlin's eyes would grow wide with thought, and he would conjure up, without effort, pictures of elves and witches and strange demons that he believed were part of the very world he lived in. Since he rarely spoke to any one except about matters concerning the business represented by the dusty back room, and took it for granted that every one there believed in elves and demons too, no one had ever argued with Drumlin that these things were not part of the everyday world, and so he never considered the fact that perhaps others did not think so. Drumlin thought not only of the good fairies and the helpful little people, but also of ghouls and specters and werewolves, for even he knew that the world was a balance of good and evil principles.

This was another reason why he never had ventured around the corner. For all he knew, the next street might be peopled with evil spirits. Since he never had seen evidence of any but good genii on his own street, it stood to reason, without the thought ever crossing his mind, that it was better to remain among the good than to venture into something about which he was not in the least curious and which might be harmful. He really cared not in the slightest what might be around the corner until he heard the spirit music, and so never missed the thrill of exploration until the music called it to his attention.

Of course Mr. Thomas Drumlin, knowing all that he did about fairies and ghosts, never bothered to read anything to learn more about them. He practically had ceased reading when he was a youth. He thought he knew what each elf and ghoul looked like—even knew how they talked. That is how he recognized the spirit music when first he heard it. He had never met or spoken to a leprechaun or brownie or pixy because he considered himself only one of the lesser beings that the genii served, and as such not entitled to see or converse with them. The big, successful men of the world, Drumlin considered, must confer with good fairies every day, and the very evil men commune with witches and vampires.

Whether it was winter or summer, Drumlin sat by his window and thought—though exactly what his thoughts were at all times we may never know—until it was the hour for bed. And then in the morning he would rise and make some breakfast, go to sit on his stool in the dusty back room, and the day would start all over again.

As a matter of fact, Drumlin's subconscious attitude about the evil that might be around the corner was correct, for he lived on the edge of a settlement of swarthy foreigners who were not the most law-abiding of the city's population, according to the records in a near-by police station. They were continually making merry and becoming drunk and fighting, though Drumlin knew nothing of it except for certain sounds that welled up from between the houses that he could see off beyond his window. When the window was closed he heard no sounds, and when the casement was open it is to be assumed that he was so engrossed with his musings that they were not apparent to him.

ON ONE particular summer evening, however, when the sun had long disappeared and when Drumlin was chin in hand at the window-sill as usual, with his mind wandering in the distances where the stars were beginning to come out, a certain rhythmical cadence intruded into his thoughts. In some way it appeared to parallel the course of his

thinking at the time and, almost without realizing, Drumlin found himself listening.

The music floated up from one of the dingy brick canyons beyond his window, and consisted of the twanging of a stringed instrument accompanied by several voices not so musical. They were repeating, again and again, a refrain that Drumlin seemed to recognize, and emphasizing the end of the line with vigorous stamping of the feet. Gradually, as his consciousness focussed upon it, Drumlin realized that the singing was in the language of the little people.

Olla huula, huula hei!
Olla huula, huula hei!

The refrain continued for some time, the shuffling and stamping leading Drumlin to believe that the persons to whom the voices belonged were dancing clumsily in a circle. Suddenly the singing and twanging stopped and, although Drumlin listened for a long time, it was not resumed. The spot from which it had come was far beneath his sight.

Though the words of the singers could have no translation in worldly language, Drumlin understood them as an invitation to join the singers in rites of some sort. His heart thumped at the thought that at last some of the little people were calling him to speak with them. His curiosity was stirred as to whether these were elves or demons, for Drumlin knew that good and evil spirits speak the same language at times, yet he went to bed and tossed wakefully for a long time without once thinking of venturing around the corner.

The next night, because he had been slow in adding his columns of figures during the day, Mr. Thomas Drumlin arrived home much later than usual, and the stars were already out before he filled his kettle with water for washing the dishes and placed it over the gas flame. Just then there came through the open window the sound of a twanging instrument, voices singing and feet stamping.

Olla huula, huula hei!

Drumlin stood still for many minutes, not daring to move lest he might lose some note of the repeated invitation. Presently he realized that if he was to answer the spirit music that called him, he must do so before the notes died away. And standing there, with his tea-kettle singing on the stove, Mr. Thomas Drumlin at last conceived the idea of going downstairs and around the corner.

SOMETHING seemed to restrain him when first he attempted to move, but he wrenched away and, holding his breath so that he might lose none of the refrain that he could barely hear after he had shut the door of his room, Drumlin tiptoed down the stairs. As he stepped out on the street he wondered that his feet were so light and ethereal, but the twanging and singing were louder now, and the little people were stamping harder than ever.

Then, as Mr. Thomas Drumlin turned the corner around which he had never seen before, the shouting and stamping rose into a final crescendo—*Olla huula, huula HEI!*—and stopped, and there was Drumlin, around the corner, with no voices calling him, and nothing but the same old hum of the city to guide him to the little people.

Just what happened after that concerned Drumlin in a far different way. Part of it is a matter of record which, if people were to take the same attitude that he did, might prove that genii and fairies do cause some of the things that happen.

There is on record, for instance, the fact that Patrolman Moriarity telephoned to his station house to say that he had found a little, middle-aged man wandering near his call-box on a certain corner apparently suffering from loss of memory, and the fact that he called a few minutes later to tell his superior that the man had disappeared. There is also a slip of paper on which the medical examiner wrote, several hours later, of finding one Thomas Drumlin dead on arrival after a tea-kettle had boiled over and extinguished a gas flame.

Nothing was ever committed to writing, however, about Patrolman Moriarity's remark to the medical examiner that Mr. Thomas Drumlin, lying before his stove at the time, was the same individual that he had found groping in the darkness on a near-by corner, or about the medical examiner's reply to Patrolman Moriarity that the latter must have been mistaken and have an imagination that played tricks with him.

But it somehow occurred to Patrolman Moriarity, with his Celtic background of supernaturalism, that something other than Drumlin's worldly body was on that corner just after the little bookkeeper had drawn his last breath. Patrolman Moriarity confided this information to Mr. Drumlin's landlady, whose ancestry was similar to his, and who told of having heard occasionally strange, unearthly sounds of revelry from regions behind the house. Putting two and two together, the pair listened one night and heard a voice that the landlady swears was Mr. Thomas Drumlin's singing much louder than a number of others, as a group of invisible persons apparently stamped around in a circle to the twanging of instrument strings.

RETURN

By LEONA MAY AMES

I shall return a lonely little ghost,
  And creep into your arms some cloudy night.
You shall not know me, save that in your heart
  Old pain shall stir, and quick tears blur your sight.

You shall have no way then of knowing me,
  Save, when a bitter little wind shall moan,
You shall be suddenly aware that life
  Is cold and wide, and you are all alone.

The Boiling Photograph

By PAUL ERNST

A strange story of Northern Africa and the ka *or astral double of an American—a tale of King Tut's tomb*

NAN DILLON was entranced by Tunis from the moment of entrance, when the steamer, *City of Trieste,* turned into the long harbor channel and churned slowly past the gleaming white cluster of Sidi Bou Said and the ruins of ancient Carthage toward the dazzling pile of the city itself.

"Look! Look!" she kept exclaiming to her husband as the boat docked and porters in all colors and styles of raiment swarmed over the pier toward the gangplank. "Isn't it all like a picture postcard? Oh, I'm going to love Tunis!"

Reese Dillon smiled as broadly as she did. Like his beautiful young wife, he had never left the States before—until this appointment of his to become assistant manager of the Tunis branch of the Commercial Chemicals Corporation. He, too, had never really believed that such strange cities existed.

Arab porters in baggy blue trousers, flapping gondurahs or stately burnooses rushed toward them as they stepped ashore, chattering persuasively in guttural French. These were brushed aside by a tall, red-faced man with twinkling blue eyes and a good-natured stub of a nose, who announced that he had come as a committee of one to welcome them.

"I'm Pete Cayley, head chemist at the Works. Come on out to my car and I'll drive you home. You're cordially invited to put up at our house till you can find an apartment of your own."

They thanked him abstractedly—too busy looking at the wonders about them to think much of such prosaic things as living-quarters—and followed him out to his car. . . .

Visitors to the Orient—of which Tunis, North Africa, is as truly a part as though it were in the heart of Arabia—usually go through three mental phases. At first they are awed and impressed by the difference between East and West. Next they decide that after all the exotic spot in which they find themselves is just another place to live in, with no mystery in it whatever. Finally they begin dimly to realize that the first impression was right; that there actually are hidden forces, secret and ominous powers, subtle dangers that a Westerner will never be able to learn and guard against.

Nan rapidly ran through the first phase and into the second. She had lived in Tunis, in a cold and depressing furnished apartment, for about two months when she began to discover that this was just another city—and not a very comfortable one, either. She had trouble getting good meat. She had trouble going from place to place on the snail-like trams. She had trouble keeping the picturesque-looking Arab "house-boys" at their servant's work. She began to sneer at Tunis a little.

"Mystery of the Orient?" she observed to Reese one evening over a meal that was not too well cooked. "There is no such thing. At least, not here. This is just a dirty hole where it rains all the time in winter and you have to haggle over prices every time you buy a pound of veal steak. There's nothing mysterious about it. More unexplainable things happen in New York than could ever happen here."

Reese smiled vaguely and agreed. He was contented enough, having plunged

"Nan snatched the photograph from Hamdi's hand."

into his work to the exclusion of everything else.

One feature of Tunis alone retained its appeal for Nan. That was — the Souks. The Souks! Those picturesque, dimly tunneled bazars of Tunis that, save for the Grand Bazar in Constantinople, are the finest native markets in the world. Nan spent hours daily wandering through them, looking at rugs and brass and leather work, and the Tunisian silk which is one of the strongest and most brilliant of fabrics. And it was in the Souks that she met the soft-eyed merchant, Hamdi.

Hamdi, a wealthy, youngish, good-looking Arab who claimed that his ancestry on his mother's side went back to the not-too-celibate priests of ancient Egypt, was attracted to Nan from the moment he laid eyes on her. He didn't attempt to conceal the fact. Also he didn't attempt to conceal his bewilderment at her continued self-possession in the face of his attentions. He was a polished cosmopolite, at home in London and Paris and Berlin; and he knew how to ply a woman with suave compliments.

He surmised shortly that Nan was, fundamentally, wrapped up in her husband's devotion. And it is probable that he figured that Nan might turn to him, in lonely perplexity, if something should happen to Reese. . . .

FRANKLY Nan encouraged the handsome descendant of the old Egyptian priests more than a little. There was nothing to the affair, really; only she led him on a bit more than she might have led on a fellow American.

There was some excuse for her. The

Europeans who live in Tunis are a seclusive crowd, mainly French, who snub strangers. The few Americans who worked at the chemical plant were not congenial to Nan. Reese was busy night and day learning his new responsibilities; and she was lonesome.

So she allowed Hamdi to flirt with her —a very little—and spent more time at his gorgeous shop than Reese, had he known about it, might have liked. And always Hamdi must have been thinking of the annoying husband that stood between this beautiful alien and himself.

Their meetings, during which she was always coolly mistress of herself while allowing him an occasional moment of verbal ardor, were not always held at his shop. Now and then he came to her apartment—very business-like and matter-of-fact, with special consignments of goods he thought she might be interested in. And it was there that he finally showed her the ring.

A fine figure of a man, with his luxurious burnoose and his dark eyes and skin, he stalked into the stone-floored vestibule on that call of his which was to prove his last.

"Good afternoon, *Madame,*" he greeted her in his precise and formal English that went so ill with his fiery glance and beak-nosed, Arabian good looks. "You are feeling well, I trust?"

"Yes, of course. Thank you," said Nan, frowning a little. She could see no boy bearing parcels or bolts of cloth, and she didn't quite like the idea of Hamdi's calling unless he actually had something to sell. It made his visit seem too personal. But it developed that he did have something to show her after all.

"I've just received a very interesting thing," he said, after chatting with her for a few minutes, his eyes fixed on the softness of her throat. "It is—this."

He brought out a small case and opened it. Within was a massive ring. It was a signet ring, of reddish-yellow gold, plainly very old. The flat stone was cornelian, or some such red substance. Engraved roughly on it were irregular symbols that even Nan, who new nothing of such matters, recognized as picture-writing—hieroglyphics.

"It is Egyptian," said Hamdi. "It was smuggled out of Egypt by a guide who works near Luxor. He claims it was taken from the entrance of the burial place you Americans call King Tut's tomb." He smiled. "It was set there, at the portal—possibly by one of my own ancestors—as a guard against the despoiling of the dead. It is supposed to have great powers, to be a sort of magic talisman."

"How odd!" murmured Nan politely. She wasn't greatly intrigued. Hamdi had shown her many more beautiful objects. As for the idea that an antique ring could have magic powers—she didn't even bother to laugh! The world believed in queer things six thousand years ago; in things that could hardly stir an intelligent person's credulity today.

"What do the symbols mean?" she asked, trying to make conversation. "Do you know?"

"Yes," said Hamdi, "as it happens, I do. A friend of mine, an Egyptologist, translated it for me. Freely rendered, it means, 'This ring invokes the *ka.* Beware!' "

"And what," inquired Nan, raising her eyebrows humorously, "does that signify?"

Hamdi touched lightly on Egyptian mythology, a subject Nan knew little about and cared less. He told her of the old theology, of Isis, of the *ka*—that wandering spirit-soul that in life and in death was hurt as the body was hurt and which, conversely, injured the body as *it* was injured.

Nan laughed. "You mean to say that people intelligent enough to build the pyramids and carve the sphinx were such fools as to believe in trash like that? They believed that this *ka* thing could be represented in effigy, for instance, and could be used to hurt its distant body?"

"They believed it implicitly," said Hamdi, smiling in his turn. "They used to fashion little statuettes of enemies, invoke their *kas,* and transfix the statuettes with daggers. When that happened the enemies themselves, possibly a thousand miles away, were supposed to drop dead."

"How absurd!"

"Yet, as you yourself have observed, they were intelligent people," murmured Hamdi.

"That sounds as though *you* believe it! Do you?"

Hamdi shrugged. "Do you, *Madame?*"

"How can you ask such a question? I'm not a child. Of course I know such a thing is only a fable."

Hamdi's classic features achieved something almost like a grin. "Would you defy the gods of Egypt?" he asked lightly. "As the ring says, 'Beware,' *Madame.*"

Nan sniffed. "You can stick my effigy with knives any time you please, and invoke my *ka* with that ridiculous ring as often as you choose!"

"Would you be as defiant as that if your husband's *ka* were concerned?"

Nan stared at him in displeasure. "I don't think I understand you, Monsieur Hamdi."

"I meant no offense," Hamdi hastened to reassure her. "I merely meant that perhaps your superiority to these old legends might falter if one proposed—invoking your husband's *ka* and injuring *his* effigy."

"I'm sure Reese wouldn't care what we did to his Egyptian spirit double. I don't think he's even aware that he has one."

"If you're so very sure," said Hamdi, glancing at the polished nails of his well-kept fingers, "let's try it. We have all the materials. We have the sacred ring of Tut; I myself am supposed to have in my veins the blood of the priests who fashioned the talisman; and we have an effigy of your husband more faithful to life than any the old Egyptians possessed —that photograph of Monsieur Dillon, there, in the silver frame. Let us touch it with the ring, invoke the *ka,* and pierce the picture——"

"Monsieur Hamdi!" Nan's blue eyes were beginning to smolder.

"Again let me assure you that I mean no offense. I only propose a delightful and harmless game. Can you not separate my suggestion from personalities? Or is it that you are really a little afraid of consequences, in spite of your expressed scorn for the poor, misguided ancients?"

Nan paused. She did object to Hamdi's mention of Reese in any way. Also she didn't feel as comfortable as she might, talking to the Arab here in the privacy of her apartment. But she didn't care to have him know that. Nor did she care to have him know the semi-hypnotic languor his eyes were imposing upon her. She made her tone more casual.

"Of course I'm not afraid of consequences. I protested because I didn't want the picture spoiled. It's an especially good pose."

"But surely you possess an older picture, a likeness that you do not care so much about."

"I don't believe I have any," evaded Nan.

But Hamdi's eyes had been alert. "That old, faded picture in the entrance hall can have little significance. Let us experiment with that."

Nan made no more objection. She was just human enough to resent the hinted raillery in Hamdi's voice. She felt that he was laughing at her. Besides, his

eyes, boring into hers, seemed to be willing her not to say "No."

"Do what you choose," she said at last. "It's an old photograph, taken before I knew him. I'm sure he wouldn't mind what happened to it."

"Ah, but would his *ka* mind what happens to it?" The challenge in Hamdi's voice was more pronounced.

"We'll invoke it and find out," replied Nan. She rose and got the photograph. "Come, we'll make the kitchen our laboratory. There's nothing in here—not even a paper knife to operate on the picture with."

THEY went out through the high-ceilinged dining-room to the gloomy, damp chamber that had been outfitted as a kitchen. Nan was regaining some of her sophisticated self-control. She admitted inwardly that, for an instant, she had felt absurdly qualmish about mutilating Reese's picture. His "effigy." But now she had dismissed that silly compunction, and was ready to prove to Hamdi that she didn't give a snap of the fingers for all the old superstitions on earth.

On the wood range was a large iron pot full of boiling water, in which were the vegetables for dinner. Her present house-boy, Mohamed, had placed them there and then gone carelessly away to visit with a cousin in the Souks.

Nan set the pot a little to one side of the flame so that it would boil less violently; and, prying open the picture frame, took out Reese's photograph.

"What happens first?" she asked, handing it to Hamdi.

"First we summon the spirit," said Hamdi, his face becoming graver than it had been while he was persuading her to take part in the "game."

He held the red, roughly engraved stone of the ring lightly against the photograph. "Invoke the *ka* of this man, oh ring of Tut, according to the dread power engraved on thee."

Nan gazed at him with a barely repressed shiver. He seemed to have expanded before her eyes. His face had an exultant, almost demoniac look.

"I don't see anything," she announced, looking around with exaggerated awe, striving to keep her tone casual.

"One never sees a *ka*. It is invisible spirit-matter—but of course you don't believe in all that." Hamdi paused. "Now that we have induced your husband's *ka* to enter his photograph, what shall we do with it?"

He glanced around the shadowed room, his gaze finally resting on the simmering pot of vegetables.

"The inspiration of Isis has descended upon me." In his eyes shone a glint of some emotion that did not match the mocking line of his mouth. "Instead of stabbing the picture, we shall place it in that boiling water."

He walked quickly to the range, and lifted the cover from the pot.

He poised the photograph, head downward, over the boiling water. His hand descended till the edge of the picture touched the bubbling surface. Slowly it dipped lower. . . .

The scalding water curled the glazed paper like corroding acid. It touched the top of Reese's pictured head—lapped against the right side of his face——

"No! No!"

Nan snatched the photograph from Hamdi's hand. She was panting, sobbing for breath, and her eyes were wide with an expression that betokened sheer, blind panic.

"Don't! Oh, don't!" She clutched the picture to her breast. Gradually her breathing grew evener, and color came back to her cheeks. "This is in bad taste, Monsieur Hamdi. We'll stop it now, if you please."

"But, *Madame,* surely you are not afraid?"

"I'm not a bit afraid." She spoke the truth. After her second or so of senseless, reasonless fear, she had recovered her New York sophistication. "I'm merely tired of this silly game. Silly? It's insane! I don't know what possessed me to consent to it."

"If you are not afraid, why not go further in your defiance to the old gods——"

"Because I don't care to," Nan cut him off. She put her hand to her forehead. "I have a headache, Monsieur Hamdi. Would you mind postponing the rest of our conversation till some other time? And take the ring with you, please. It it very interesting, but I have no intention of buying it."

The Arab looked at her. It was set in lines of finality. It declared, as plainly as spoken words could have done, that she was seeing the last of him. With his lips quivering in a grimace that was more of a snarl than a smile, he bowed and left the apartment.

NAN walked wearily to a chair and sank down in it. Her head was aching in earnest, and the thoughts that whirled relentlessly through her mind did not tend to soothe her.

How silly she had been in her half-intimacy with the merchant. Her contact with Hamdi had been reckless, absurd. But there was something in the very air of Tunis, with its ancient, high-walled nucleus of Arab palaces and mosques, that encouraged recklessness, absurdity. . . .

How nonsensical—and somehow unfaithful to Reese—had been that hocus-pocus with his photograph! And how curious her spasm of horror when the scalding water touched the top of his head and the right side of his face! For one instant she had felt as terrified, as abjectly remorseful, as though she had let Reese himself be lowered, head down, into the boiling liquid!

The bell jangled, interrupting her uncomfortable revery. She went to the door, wondering if Hamdi had had the effrontery to return. But it wasn't Hamdi who had rung. Through the panels of the door she could hear, as she busied herself with loosing the massive, old-fashioned catch, several American voices. Among them she caught the deep tones of Cayley.

With a queer feeling of unease beginning to weigh on her mind, she worked at the catch. She couldn't imagine that anything had gone wrong at the plant. Reese's work was not particularly dangerous. But why, if nothing were wrong, had Cayley and several other workmen come to see her in the middle of the afternoon?

She got the door open at last—and at the sight that met her eyes she instinctively held out her hand to keep from falling.

Four men were in the corridor. Of these, one was Reese—with the top of his head and the right side of his face swathed in bandages.

". . . nothing to be alarmed about," she heard Cayley's voice through the gathering blackness. "He fell into a vat of acid . . . wonderful luck . . . coat caught on a spike just as he was about to go all the way in, head first . . . just burned his head and face a little . . ."

Cayley jumped toward her, catching her as she was falling, unconscious, to the floor.

The Wolf-Leader

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Story Thus Far

THIBAULT, a carver of *sabots*, the wooden shoes of the French peasants, lived alone in a forest near Villers-Cotterets on the estate of the Baron of Vez. A good-looking man in his late twenties, Thibault had seen just enough of the world to make him discontented with his own station in life. He envied every one whose fortunes were better than his.

The Baron of Vez was an ardent huntsman. Following a stag one day, his dog pack lost the scent near Thibault's hut. The shoemaker was at home, and the Baron questioned him regarding the direction taken by the stag. A fit of perversity seized Thibault and he denied seeing the deer, returning flippant answers to the nobleman's questions.

It was in his mind to hunt and kill the stag for himself, once he could be rid of the Baron's party, a determination that was strengthened when the Baron lost patience, knocked Thibault down and struck him with a hunting whip.

Finding the stag proved difficult, however. Prayers addressed to the Deity failed to obtain results and Thibault finally called upon the name of the devil—and the devil heard him. To his amazement, Thibault found the stag tied inside his hut when he went home that night.

But the stag was a mild surprize in contrast to Thibault's second visitor, a huge black wolf that appeared in the hut in a very mysterious way. When the shoemaker raised a hatchet with an idea of killing the wolf, he was dumfounded to hear the beast speak. The strange creature gave Thibault to understand that the devil was of a mind to bargain and would grant the man's desires in return for hairs from his head, one for the first wish, two for the second, four for the third and so on, doubling the number for every wish granted. The wolf then gave Thibault a ring in exchange for one the shoemaker was wearing and the unholy pact was complete.

At the next encounter with the Baron of Vez, Thibault was still more insolent and the Baron ordered him whipped. The Baron's man, Marcotte, began the punishment but after Thibault had received several severe blows a young girl, Agnelette, came out of the bushes and interceded with the Baron who ordered the whipping stopped in exchange for Agnelette's kisses.

The girl told Thibault frankly, after

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

the Baron's party departed, that she wished to be married and the shoemaker virtually promised to marry her, though his pact with the devil had given him other ambitions. He dared hope to marry Madame Polet, a pretty and wealthy widow who owned the mill at Croyelles.

The devil's promise took effect when hatred toward the Baron and the nobleman's man, Marcotte, resulted in a wish of harm toward them. Marcotte's horse ran away and plunged into the river where the poor man was drowned. The Baron, subject to apoplexy, had a fit and nearly died.

The next day Thibault aroused horror in Agnelette when all his efforts to place the devil's ring on her finger failed and when one of his hairs turned blood-red. He found it impossible to remove the red hair.

Parting his hair in such a way as to conceal the red one, Thibault went to Croyelles, meeting on the way his cousin, a youth named Landry, who worked at the mill for Madame Polet. Landry confessed that he was in love with his pretty employer, a matter that troubled Thibault until Landry complained that his devotion had aroused no response from the pretty widow.

Arrived at the mill, Thibault was entertained kindly by Madame Polet but could make no impression on her, learning to his dismay that she really felt tenderness for Landry. To Thibault's delight, a recruiting sergeant came for the boy who, it seemed, had enlisted in a fit of despondency over his hopeless love. The widow sought to hide Landry in her room and would have succeeded if Thibault had not revealed the boy's hiding place.

After Landry had been taken away, Thibault proposed marriage to Madame Polet who flew into a fury and set her servants upon him. Thibault started to run away but was tripped by a pig that ran between his legs.

"Devil take you, beast!" he cried, and straightway the pig began acting as if possessed of the devil.

Thibault escaped up a steep hillside where the servants could not follow. "What can we do against a werewolf?" they asked their mistress.

Going home through the forest, Thibault was alarmed when a pack of wolves surrounded him, but he soon discovered that they were friendly. That night and on subsequent nights they formed a sort of guard around his hut, even hunting for deer and bringing him venison when he desired it.

Thibault observed that one lock of his hair was now entirely red, but the presence of nobility in the neighborhood and envy of their pleasures made him resolve to use his satanic allies to the utmost, even if all his hair should be claimed by the devil's color.

CHAPTER 10

Maître Magloire

IN THIS reckless state of mind Thibault, who had not as yet decided on any special course of action, spent the last days of the old year and the first of the new. Still, remembering the heavy expenses entailed on each and all by New Year's Day, he had exacted double rations from his usual purveyor, as the trying time drew nearer and nearer, simultaneously, drawing double profits from the landlord of the *Boule-d'Or*.

Thus it came about that, apart from the disquieting fact that his mash of red hair was getting larger and larger almost every day, Thibault entered upon the new year in a better condition as to material matters than he had ever known before.

Observe, I say, as to *material* matters, and material matters only; for albeit the body might seem in good plight, the soul was already alarmingly compromised. The body, at any rate, was well clothed, and ten crowns or more made a merry jingling in his waistcoat pocket; and so dressed, and so accompanied by this silvery music, Thibault no longer appeared like a shoemaker's apprentice, but like some well-to-do farmer, or even a comfortable citizen, carrying on a trade maybe, but simply for his own pleasure.

Looking as he now did, Thibault went to one of those village functions which are fête-days for the whole province. The magnificent ponds of Berval and Poudron were to be drawn. Now the drawing of a pond is a grand affair for the owner, or for the one who farms it, not to mention the great pleasure it affords to the spectators. Such an event therefore is advertised a month in advance, and people come from thirty miles round to enjoy this fine entertainment. And to those of my readers who are not accustomed to the manners and customs of the provinces, let me explain that the fishing which takes place is not a fishing with the line, baited with worms, or scented wheat, or with the cast-net, or the sweep-net, nothing of the kind; this fishing consists in emptying a pond, sometimes nearly a mile, or even three miles long, of every fish from the largest pike to the smallest minnow.

In all probability, not a single one of my readers has ever seen the kind of pond to which I refer. I will describe it; to begin with, it always has two issues, that by which the water flows in, that by which the water flows out; that by which the water enters has no particular name, that by which it is let out is called the sluice. The water as it leaves the sluice falls into a large reservoir whence it escapes through the meshes of a strong net; the water flows away, but the fish remain. Every one knows that it takes several days to empty a pond; therefore those who wish to take a share in the fishing are not summoned to attend before the second, third, or fourth day, according to the volume of water which the pond has to disgorge before it is ready for the final act, and this takes place as soon as the fish appear at the sluice.

At the hour announced for the fishing, a crowd assembles, varying in number according to the size and the celebrity of the pond.

When the sluice is first opened, the water that pours through is beautifully clear, and slightly green in color, like the water of a brook; this is the upper layer, which, carried along by its weight, is the first to appear. By degrees the water becomes less transparent, and takes on a grayish hue; this is the second layer, emptying itself in turn, and every now and then, more frequently as the water becomes muddier, a ray of silver is seen to dart through it; it is some fish, too small and weak to resist the current, which flashes past as if acting as scout for its stronger brethren. Nobody troubles to pick it up; it is allowed to lie gasping, and trying to find some little stagnant puddle of water at the bottom of the pond, flapping, floundering and capering like an acrobat going through his antics. Then the black water comes pouring through; this is the last act, the final catastrophe.

Each fish, according to its power of resistance, struggles against the current which is bearing it along in this unusual manner. Instinctively they feel there is danger, and each strives its hardest to swim in an opposite direction; the pike struggles beside the carp which it was yesterday pursuing so hard; the perch is reconciled to the tench, and as they swim side by side, does not so much as think of taking a bite out of the flesh he finds

so palatable at other times. So the Arabs at times find huddled together in the pits they dig to catch game, gazelles and jackals, antelopes and hyenas, the jackals and hyenas having grown as gentle and as timid as the gazelles and antelopes.

But the strength of the struggling and dying fish begins at last to fail. The scouts that we noticed a few minutes ago become more numerous; the size of the fish becomes more respectable, which is proved to them by the attention they receive from the pickers-up. These pickers-up are men, clad in plain linen trousers and cotton shirts; the trousers are rolled up to above the knee, and the shirt sleeves turned up to the shoulders. The fish are gathered up in baskets; those destined to be sold alive, or kept for restocking the pond, are poured off into tanks; those condemned to death are simply spread out on the grass, and will be sold before the day is out.

As the fish grow more and more abundant the cries of delight from the spectators become louder and more frequent; for these onlookers are not like the audiences in our theaters; they have no idea of stifling their feelings, or showing good taste by appearing indifferent. No, they come to amuse themselves, and every fine tench, or fine carp, or fine pike, calls forth loud, undisguised and delighted applause.

At last the moment comes when the water ceases to flow; the passage is obstructed by the remainder of the fish, the bigwigs of the pond, and the pickers-up have veritable monsters to fight with. This is the supreme moment. Now comes the climax of applause, the last vociferous bravos. Then, the play being over, every one goes to examine the actors; the latter are mostly lying gasping to death on the grass of the field, while a certain number are recovering themselves in the water. You look about for the eels; where are the eels, you ask? Then three or four eels, about as big around as your thumb and half the length of your arm, are pointed out to you; for the eels, thanks to their peculiar organization, have momentarily escaped the general carnage. The eels have taken a header into the mud and disappeared; and this is the reason why you may see men with guns walking up and down at the edge of the pond, and hear a report from time to time. If you ask the reason for this shooting, you will be told that it is to bring the eels out of their hiding-places.

It was to a fête of this kind that every one at Villers-Cotterets, at Crespy, at Mont-Gobert, and in the surrounding villages had been invited. Thibault went like everybody else; he had now no need to work, finding it simpler to allow the wolves to work for him. From a workman he had risen to be a man at ease; it now only remained to make himself a gentleman, and Thibault counted upon being able to do this. He was not a man to allow himself to remain in the rear, and he therefore made good use of his arms and legs so as to secure a place in the front row. In the course of this maneuver he happened to rumple the dress of a tall, fine woman, next to whom he was trying to install himself. The lady was fond of her clothes, and no doubt, also, she was in the habit of commanding, which naturally produces an attitude of disdain; for, turning to see who had brushed past her, she let fall the uncompromising word: "Lout!" Notwithstanding the rudeness of the remark, the mouth that uttered the words was so beautiful, the lady so pretty, and her momentary anger in such ugly contrast to the charming expression of her face, that Thibault, instead of retorting in similar style, only drew back, stammering some sort of excuse.

There is no need to remind the reader that of all aristocracies, beauty is still the chief. If the woman had been old and ugly, she might have been a marquise, but Thibault would certainly have called her by some opprobrious title. It is possible also that Thibault's ideas were somewhat distracted by the strange appearance of the man who served as knight to this lady. He was a stout man of about sixty years of age, dressed entirely in black, and of a dazzling exactness of toilet; but so extremely short that his head scarcely reached the lady's elbow, and as she would have been unable to take his arm without positive torture to herself, she was content to lean majestically upon his shoulder. Seeing them thus together, one might have taken her for an ancient Cybele leaning on one of those grotesque little modern figures of Chinese idols. And what a fascinating idol it was with those short legs, that bulgy stomach, those little fat podgy arms, those white hands under the lace ruffles, that plump, rubicund head and face, that well-combed, well-powdered, well-curled head of hair, and that tiny pigtail, which with every movement of its wearer's, went bobbing up and down with its neat bow of ribbon against the coat collar. It reminded one of those black beetles of which the legs seem so little in harmony with the body, that the insects seem rather to roll than to walk. And with it all, the face was so jovial, the little eyes level with the forehead were so full of kindness, that one felt involuntarily drawn toward him; one could be sure that the pleasant little man was too intent on giving himself a good time, by every means in his power, to think of quarreling with that vague and indefinite person known as one's neighbor. Wherefore, on hearing his companion speak so cavalierly to Thibault, the good fat little man appeared to be in despair.

"Gently, Madame Magloire! Gently, Madame Bailiff!" he said, contriving in these few words to let his neighbors know what and who he was: "Gently. Those were ugly words to use to the poor fellow, who is more sorry than you are for the accident."

"And may I ask, Monsieur Magloire," replied the lady, "if I am not at liberty to thank him for so nicely crumpling my beautiful blue damask dress, which is now entirely spoilt, not taking into consideration that he also trod on my little toe?"

"I beg you, Madame, to pardon my clumsiness," replied Thibault; "when you turned your face toward me, its wonderful beauty dazzled me like a ray of sunshine, so that I could not see where I was treading."

It was not a badly turned compliment for a man who for three months past had been in the daily society of a pack of wolves; nevertheless it did not produce any great effect upon the lady, who only responded with a haughty little pouting of the mouth. The truth was, that in spite of Thibault being so decently dressed, she had, with the curious insight which women possess in these matters, detected at once to what class he belonged.

Her stout little companion, however, was more indulgent, for he clapped loudly with his podgy hands, which the pose adopted by his wife left him free to use as he liked.

"Ah! bravo, bravo!" he said, "you have hit the mark, *Monsieur;* you are a clever young fellow, and seem to have studied the style to address women in. My love, I hope you appreciated the compliment as I did, and to prove to this gentleman that we are good Christians and bear no ill-will toward him, he will, I hope, if it would not be too far out of his way, accompany us home, and we will drink a bottle of old wine together, if Perrine will

get one out for us from the back of the woodshed."

"Ah! there I know you, Master Népomucène; any excuse serves you to be clinking glasses with somebody, and when no genuine occasion offers, you are very clever at ferreting out one, it does not matter where. But you know, Monsieur Magloire, that the doctor has expressly forbidden you to drink between meals."

"True, Madame Bailiff, true," replied her husband, "but he did not forbid me to show politeness to an agreeable young fellow such as *Monsieur* appears to be. Be lenient, I pray, Suzanne; give up this surly manner, which suits you so ill. Why, *Madame,* those who do not know you, would think, to hear you, that we had nearly got to quarreling over a gown. However, to prove the contrary to *Monsieur,* I promise that if you can get him to go back with us, I will, the very minute we get home, give you the money to buy that figured silk dress which you have been wishing for so long."

The effect of this promise was like magic. Madame Magloire was instantly mollified, and as the fishing was now drawing to a close, she accepted with less ungraciousness the arm which Thibault now offered her.

As to Thibault himself, struck with the beauty of the lady, and gathering from words which had fallen from her and her husband that she was the wife of a magistrate, he parted the crowd before him with an air of command, holding his head high and making his way with as much determination as if he were starting on the conquest of the Golden Fleece.

And in truth, Thibault, the bridegroom-elect of Agnelette, the lover who had been so ignominiously expelled from her house by the mistress of the mill, was thinking not only of all the pleasure he could enjoy, but of the proud position he would hold as the beloved of a bailiff's wife, and of all the advantages to be drawn from the good fortune which had so unexpectedly befallen him, and which he had so long desired.

As on her side also, Madame Magloire was not only very much preoccupied with her own thoughts, but also paid very little attention to him, looking to right and left, first in front of her and then behind, as if in search of some one, the conversation would have lagged terribly as they walked along if their excellent little companion had not been at the expense of the best part of it, as he jogged along now beside Thibault and now beside Suzanne, waddling like a duck jogging home after a big feed.

And so with Thibault engaged in his calculations, and the bailiff's wife with her dreams, the bailiff trotting beside them talking and wiping his forehead with a fine cambric pocket-handkerchief, they arrived at the village of Erneville, which is situated about a mile and a half from the Poudron ponds. It was here, in this charming village, which lies halfway between Haramont and Bonneuil, within a stone's throw or two of the Castle of Vez, the dwelling of my lord the baron, that Monseiur Magloire sat as magistrate.

CHAPTER 11

David and Goliath

After walking the whole length of the village, they stopped before an imposing-looking house at the junction of the roads leading to Longpré and Haramont. As they neared the house—the little host went on ahead, mounted the flight of five or six steps with an agility which one could not have expected, and, by dint of standing on tiptoe, managed to reach the bell with the tips of his fingers. It should be added, that having

once got hold of it, he gave it a pull which unmistakably announced the return of the master. It was, in short, no ordinary return, but a triumphal one, for the bailiff was bringing home a guest.

A maid, neatly dressed in her best clothes, opened the door. The bailiff gave her an order in a low voice, and Thibault, whose adoration of beautiful women did not prevent him from liking a good dinner, gathered that these few whispered words referred to the menu which Perrine was to prepare. Then turning round, his host addressed Thibault:

"Welcome, my dear guest, to the house of Bailiff Népomucène Magloire."

Thibault politely allowed *Madame* to pass in before him, and was then introduced into the drawing-room.

But the shoemaker now made a slip. Unaccustomed as yet to luxury, the man of the forest was not adroit enough to hide the admiration which he felt on beholding the bailiff's home. For the first time in his life he found himself in the midst of damask curtains and gilt armchairs; he had not imagined that any one save the King, or at least his Highness the Duke of Orleans, had curtains and armchairs of this magnificence. He was unconscious that all the while Madame Magloire was closely watching him, and that his simple astonishment and delight did not escape her detective eye. However, she appeared now, after mature reflection, to look with greater favor on the guest whom her husband had imposed upon her, and endeavored to soften for him the glances of her dark eyes. But her affability did not go so far as to lead her to comply with the request of Monsieur Magloire, who begged her to add to the flavor and bouquet of the champagne by pouring it out herself for her guest. Notwithstanding the entreaties of her august husband, the bailiff's wife refused, and under the pretext of fatigue from her walk, she retired to her own room. Before leaving the room, however, she expressed a hope to Thibault, that, as she owed him some expiation, he would not forget the way to Eraeville, ending her speech with a smile which displayed a row of charming teeth. Thibault responded with so much lively pleasure in his voice that it rendered any roughness of speech less noticeable, swearing that he would sooner lose the power to eat and drink than the remembrance of a lady who was as courteous as she was beautiful.

Madame Magloire gave him a curtsey which would have made her known as the bailiff's wife a mile off, and left the room.

She had hardly closed the door behind her, when Monsieur Magloire went through a pirouette in her honor, which though less light, was not less significant than the caper a schoolboy executes when once he has got rid of his master.

"Ah! my dear friend," he said, "now that we are no longer hampered by a woman's presence, we will have a good go at the wine! Those women, they are delightful at mass or at a ball; but at table, heaven defend me, there is nobody like the men! What do you say, old fellow?"

Perrine new came in to receive her master's orders as to what wine she was to bring up. But the gay little man was far too fastidious a judge of wines to trust a woman with such a commission as this. Indeed, women never show that reverential respect for certain old bottles which is their due, nor that delicacy of touch with which they love to be handled. He drew Perrine down as if to whisper something in her ear; instead of which he gave a good sound kiss to the cheek which was still young and fresh, and which did not blush sufficiently to lead to

the belief that the kiss was a novelty to it.

"Well, sir," said the girl laughing, "what is it?"

"This is it, Perrinette, my love," said the bailiff, "that I alone know the good brands, and as they are many in number, you might get lost among them, and so I am going to the cellar myself." And the good man disappeared trundling off on his little legs, cheerful, alert and fantastic as those Nuremberg toys mounted on a stand, which you wind up with a key, and which, once set going, turn round and round, or go first one way and then the other, till the spring has run down; the only difference being that this dear little man seemed wound up by the hand of God himself, and gave no sign of ever coming to a standstill.

Thibault was left alone. He rubbed his hands together, congratulated himself on having chanced upon such a well-to-do house, with such a beautiful wife, and such an amiable husband for hostess and host. Five minutes later the door again opened, and in came the bailiff, with a bottle in either hand, and one under each arm. The two under his arms were bottles of sparkling Sillery, of the first quality, which, not being injured by shaking, were safe to be carried in a horizontal position. The two which he carried in his hands, and which he held with a respectful care, were, one a bottle of very old Chambertin, the other a bottle of Hermitage.

The supper hour had now come; for it must be remembered, that at the period of which we are writing, dinner was at midday, and supper at six. Moreover, it had already been dark for some time before six o'clock, in this month of January, and whether it be six, or twelve o'clock at night, if one has to eat one's meal by candle or lamplight, it always seems like supper.

The bailiff put the bottles tenderly down on the table and rang the bell. Perrinette came in.

"When will the table be ready for us, my pretty?" asked Magloire.

"Whenever *Monsieur* pleases," replied Perrine. "I know *Monsieur* does not like waiting; so I always have everything ready in good time."

"Go and ask Madame, then, if she is not coming; tell her, Perrine, that we do not wish to sit down without her."

Perrine left the room.

"We may as well go into the dining-room to wait," said the little host; "you must be hungry, my dear friend, and when I am hungry, I like to feed my eyes before I feed my stomach."

"You seem to be a fine gourmand, you," said Thibault.

"Epicure, epicure, not gourmand—you must not confuse the two things. I go first, but only in order to show you the way."

And so saying, Monsieur Magloire led his guest into the dining-room.

"Ah!" he exclaimed gayly as he went in, patting his corporation, "tell me now, do you not think this girl of mine is a capital cook, fit to serve a Cardinal? Just look now at this little supper she has spread for us; quite a simple one, and yet it pleases me more, I am sure, than would have Belshazzar's feast."

"On my honor, Bailiff," said Thibault, "you are right; it is a sight to rejoice one's heart." And Thibault's eyes began to shine like carbuncles.

And yet it was, as the bailiff described it, quite an unpretentious little supper, but withal so appetizing to look upon, that it was quite surprizing. At one end of the table was a fine carp, boiled in vinegar and herbs, with the roe served on either side of it on a layer of parsley, dotted about with cut carrots. The opposite end was occupied by a boar-ham,

mellow-flavored, and deliciously reposing on a dish of spinach, which lay like a green islet surrounded by an ocean of gravy.

A delicate game pie, made of two partridges only, of which the heads appeared above the upper crust, as if ready to attack one another with their beaks, was placed in the middle of the table; while the intervening spaces were covered with side-dishes holding slices of Arles sausage, pieces of tunny-fish, swimming in beautiful green oil from Provence, anchovies sliced and arranged in all kinds of fantastic patterns on a white and yellow bed of chopped eggs, and pats of butter that could only have been churned that very day. As accessories to these were two or three sorts of cheese, chosen from among those of which the chief quality is to provoke thirst, some Reims biscuits, of delightful crispness, and pears just fit to eat, showing that the master himself had taken the trouble to preserve them, and to turn them about on the storeroom shelf.

Thibault was so taken up in the contemplation of this little amateur supper, that he scarcely heard the message which Perrine brought back from her mistress, who sent word that she had a sick-headache, and begged to make her excuses to her guest, with the hope that she might have the pleasure of entertaining him when he next came.

The little man gave visible signs of rejoicing on hearing his wife's answer, breathed loudly and clapped his hands, exclaiming:

"She has a headache! she has a headache! Come along then, sit down! sit down!" And thereupon, besides the two bottles of old Mâcon, which had already been respectively placed within reach of the host and guest, as *vin ordinaire*, between the *hors-d'oeuvres* and the dessert plates, he introduced the four other bottles which he had just brought up from the cellar.

Madame Magloire had, I think, acted not unwisely in refusing to sup with these stalwart champions of the table, for such was their hunger and thirst, that half the carp and the two bottles of wine disappeared without a word passing between them except such exclamations as:

"Good fish! isn't it?"

"Capital!"

"Fine wine! isn't it?"

"Excellent!"

The carp and the Mâcon being consumed, they passed on to the game pie and the Chambertin, and now their tongues began to be unloosed, especially the bailiff's.

By the time half the game-pie and the first bottle of Chambertin were finished, Thibault knew the history of Népomucène Magloire; not a very complicated one, it must be confessed.

Monsieur Magloire was son to a church ornament manufacturer who had worked for the chapel belonging to his Highness the Duke of Orleans, the latter, in his religious zeal, having a burning desire to obtain pictures by Albano and Titian for the sum of four to five thousand francs.

Chrysostom Magloire had placed his son, Népomucène Magloire, as head cook with Louis' son, his Highness the Duke of Orleans.

The young man had manifested a decided taste for cooking; he had been especially attached to the castle at Villers-Cotterets, and for thirty years presided over his Highness's dinners, the latter introducing him to his friends as a thorough artist, and from time to time sending for him to come upstairs to talk over culinary matters with Marshal Richelieu.

When fifty-five years of age, Magloire found himself so rounded in bulk that it

was only with difficulty he could get through the narrow doors of the passages and offices. Fearing to be caught some day like the weasel of the fable, he asked permission to resign his post.

The Duke consented, not without regret, but with less regret than he would have felt at any other time, for he had just married Madame de Montesson, and it was only rarely now that he visited his castle at Villers-Cotterets.

His Highness had fine old-fashioned ideas as regards superannuated retainers. He, therefore, sent for Magloire, and asked him how much he had been able to save while in his service. Magloire replied that he was happily able to retire with a competence; the Prince, however, insisted upon knowing the exact amount of his little fortune, and Magloire confessed to an income of nine thousand livres.

"A man who has provided me with such a good table for thirty years," said the Prince, "should have enough to live well upon himself for the remainder of his life." And he made up the income to twelve thousand, so that Magloire might have a thousand livres a month to spend. Added to this, he allowed him to choose furniture for the whole of his house from his own old lumber-room; and thence came the damask curtains and gilt arm chairs, which, although just a little bit faded and worn, had nevertheless preserved that appearance of granduer which had made such an impression on Thibault.

By the time the whole of the first partridge was finished, and half the second bottle had been drunk, Thibault knew that Madame Magloire was the host's fourth wife, a fact which seemed in his own eyes to add a good foot or two to his height.

He had also ascertained that he had married her not for her fortune, but for her beauty, having always had as great a predilection for pretty faces and beautiful statues, as for good wines and appetizing victuals, and Monsieur Magloire further stated, with no sign of faltering, that, old as he was, if his wife were to die, he should have no fear in entering on a fifth marriage.

As he now passed from the Chambertin to the Hermitage, which he alternated with the Sillery, Monsieur Magloire began to speak of his wife's qualities. She was not the personification of docility, no, quite the reverse; she was somewhat opposed to her husband's admiration for the various wines of France, and did everything she could, even using physical force, to prevent his too frequent visits to the cellar; while, for one who believed in living without ceremony, she on her part was too fond of dress, too much given to elaborate head-gears, English laces, and such like gewgaws, which women make part of their arsenal; she would gladly have turned the twelve hogsheads of wine, which formed the staple of her husband's cellar, into lace for her arms, and ribands for her throat, if Monsieur Magloire had been the man to allow this metamorphosis. But, with this exception, there was not a virtue which Suzanne did not possess, and these virtues of hers, if the bailiff was to be believed, were carried on so perfectly shaped a pair of legs, that if by any misfortune she were to lose one, it would be quite impossible throughout the district to find another that would match the leg that remained. The good man was like a regular whale, blowing out self-satisfaction from all his air-holes, as the former does sea-water. But even before all these hidden perfections of his wife had been revealed to him by the bailiff, her beauty had already made such a deep impression on the shoemaker, that, as we have seen, he could do nothing but think of it in silence as he walked beside her,

and since he had been at table, he had continued to dream about it, listening to his host without answering, as Monsieur Magloire, delighted to have such an accommodating audience, poured forth his tales, linked one to another like a necklace of beads.

But the worthy bailiff gave Thibault to understand that he had now said all that he wished to tell him concerning himself and his wife, and that it was Thibault's turn to give him some information as regards his own circumstances, the amiable little man adding that wishing often to visit him, he wished to know more about him. Thibault felt that it was very necessary to disguise the truth; and accordingly gave himself out as a man living at ease in the country, on the revenues of two farms and of a hundred acres of land, situated near Vertefeuille.

There was, he continued, a splendid warren on these hundred acres, with a wonderful supply of red and fallow deer, boars, partridges, pheasants and hares, of which the bailiff should have some to taste. The bailiff was astonished and delighted. As we have seen, by the menu for his table, he was fond of venison, and he was carried away with joy at the thought of obtaining his game without having recourse to the poachers, and through the channel of this new friendship.

And now, the last drop of the seventh bottle having been scrupulously divided between the two glasses, they decided that it was time to stop.

The rosy champagne—prime vintage of Aï, and the last bottle emptied—had brought Népomucène Magloire's habitual good nature to the level of tender affection. He was charmed with his new friend, who tossed off his bottle in almost as good style as he did himself; he addressed him as his bosom friend, he embraced him, he made him promise that there should be a morrow to their pleasant entertainment; he stood a second time on tiptoe to give him a parting hug as he accompanied him to the door, which Thibault on his part, bending down, received with the best grace in the world.

The church clock of Erneville was striking midnight as the door closed behind the shoemaker. The fumes of the heady wine he had been drinking had begun to give him a feeling of oppression before leaving the house, but it was worse when he got into the open air. He staggered, overcome with giddiness, and went and leant with his back against a wall. What followed next was as vague and mysterious to him as the fantasmagoria of a dream. Above his head, about six or eight feet from the ground, was a window, which, as he moved to lean against the wall, had appeared to him to be lighted, although the light was shaded by double curtains.

He had hardly taken up his position against the wall when he thought he heard it open. It was, he imagined, the worthy bailiff, unwilling to part with him without sending him a last farewell, and he tried to step forward so as to do honor to this gracious intention, but his attempt was unavailing. At first he thought he was stuck to the wall like a branch of ivy, but he was soon disabused of this idea. He felt a heavy weight planted first on the right shoulder and then on the left, which made his knees give way so that he slid down the wall as if to seat himself. This maneuver on Thibault's part appeared to be just what the individual who was making use of him as a ladder wished him to do, for we can no longer hide the fact that the weight so felt was that of a man. As Thibault made his forced genuflexion, the man was also lowered. "That's right, l'Eveillé! that's right!" he said, "So!" and with this last

word, he jumped to the ground, while overhead was heard the sound of a window being shut.

Thibault had sense enough to understand two things; first, that he was mistaken for some one called l'Eveillé, who was probably asleep somewhere about the premises; secondly, that his shoulders had just served some lover as a climbing ladder; both of which things caused Thibault an undefined sense of humiliation.

Accordingly he seized hold mechanically of some floating piece of stuff which he took to be the lover's cloak, and, with the persistency of a drunken man, continued to hang on to it.

"What are you doing that for, you scoundrel?" asked a voice, which did not seem altogether unfamiliar to the shoemaker. "One would think you were afraid of losing me."

"Most certainly I am afraid of losing you," replied Thibault, "because I wish to know who it is has the impertinence to use my shoulders for a ladder."

"Phew!" said the unknown, "it's not you then, l'Eveillé?"

"No, it is not," replied Thibault.

"Well, whether it is you or not you, I thank you."

"How, thank you? Ah! I dare say! thank you, indeed! You think the matter is going to rest like that, do you?"

"I had counted upon it being so, certainly."

"Then you counted without your host."

"Now, you blackguard, leave go of me! You are drunk!"

"Drunk! What do you mean? We only drank seven bottles between us, and the bailiff had a good four to his share."

"Leave go of me, you drunkard, do you hear!"

"Drunkard! you call me a drunkard, a drunkard for having drunk three bottles of wine!"

"I don't ll you a drunkard because you drank three bottles of wine, but because you let yourself get tipsy over those three unfortunate bottles."

And, with a gesture of commiseration, and trying for the third time to release his cloak, the unknown continued:

"Now then, are you going to let go my cloak or not, you idiot?"

Thibault was at all times touchy as to the way people addressed him, but in his present state of mind his susceptibility amounted to extreme irritation.

"By the devil!" he exclaimed, "let me tell you, my fine sir, that the only idiot here is the man who gives insults in return for the services of which he has made use, and seeing that is so, I do not know what prevents me planting my fist in the middle of your face."

This menace was scarcely out of his mouth, when, as instantly as a cannon goes off once the flame of the match has touched the powder, the blow with which Thibault had threatened his unknown adversary, came full against his own cheek.

"Take that, you beast," said the voice which brought back to Thibault certain recollections in connection with the blow he received. "I am a good Jew, you see, and pay you back your money before weighing your coin."

Thibault's answer was a blow in the chest; it was well directed, and Thibault felt inwardly pleased with it himself. But it had no more effect on his antagonist than the fillip from a child's finger would have on an oak tree. It was returned by a second blow of the fist which so far exceeded the former in the force with which it was delivered, that Thibault felt certain if the giant's strength went on increasing in the same ratio, that a third of the kind would level him with the ground.

But the very violence of his blow brought disaster on Thibault's unknown

assailant. Thibault had fallen on to one knee, and so doing, his hand, touching the ground, came in contact with a stone. Rising in fury to his feet again, with the stone in his hand, he flung it at his enemy's head. The colossal figure uttered a sound like the bellowing of an ox, turned round on himself, and then, like an oak tree cut off by the roots, fell his whole length on the ground, and lay there insensible.

Not knowing whether he had killed, or only wounded his adversary, Thibault took to his heels and fled, not even turning to look behind him.

CHAPTER 12

Wolves in the Sheepfold

THE forest was not far from the bailiff's house, and in two bounds Thibault found himself on the farther side of *Les Fossés*, and in the wooded path leading to the brickyard. He had no sooner entered the forest than his usual escort surrounded him, fawning and blinking with their eyes and wagging their tails to show their pleasure. Thibault, who had been so alarmed the first time he found himself in company with this strange bodyguard, took no more notice of them now than if they had been a pack of poodles. He gave them a word or two of caress, softly scratched the head of the one that was nearest him, and continued on his way, thinking over his double triumph.

He had beaten his host at the bottle, he had vanquished his adversary at fisticuffs, and in this joyous frame of mind, he walked along, saying aloud to himself:

"You must acknowledge, friend Thibault, that you are a lucky rascal! Madame Suzanne is in every possible respect just what you want! A bailiff's wife! my word! that's a conquest worth making! and if he dies first, what a wife to get! But in either case, when she is walking beside me, and taking my arm, whether as wife or mistress, the devil take it, if I am mistaken for anything but a gentleman! And to think that unless I am fool enough to play my cards badly, all this will be mine! For she did not deceive me by the way she went off: those who have nothing to fear have no need to take flight. She was afraid to show her feelings too plainly at first meeting; but how kind she was after she got home! I have only got to push matters a bit; and some fine morning she will find herself rid of her fat little old man, and then the thing is done. Not that I do, or can, wish for the death of poor Monsieur Magloire. If I take his place after he is no more, well and good; but to kill a man who has given you such good wine to drink! to kill him with his good wine still hot in your mouth! why, even my friend the wolf would blush for me if I were guilty of such a deed."

Then with one of his most roguish smiles, he went on: "And besides, would it not be as well to have already acquired some rights over Madame Suzanne, by the time Monsieur Magloire passes, in the course of nature, into the other world, which, considering the way in which the old scamps eats and drinks, can not be a matter of long delay?"

My readers will doubtless not be of the same way of thinking as Thibault, who saw nothing offensive in this pleasantry of his, but on the contrary, rubbed his hands together smiling at his own thoughts, and indeed so pleased with them that he had reached the town, and found himself at the end of the Rue de Largny before he was aware that he had left the bailiff's house more than a few hundred paces behind him.

He now made a sign to his wolves, for it was not quite prudent to traverse the

whole town of Villers-Cotterets with a dozen wolves walking alongside as a guard of honor; not only might they meet dogs by the way, but the dogs might wake up the inhabitants.

Six of his wolves, therefore, went off to the right, and six to the left, and although the paths they took were not exactly of the same length, and although some of them went more quickly than the others, the whole dozen nevertheless managed to meet, without one missing, at the end of the Rue de Lormet. As soon as Thibault had reached the door of his hut, they took leave of him and disappeared; but, before they dispersed, Thibault requested them to be at the same spot on the morrow, as soon as night fell.

ALTHOUGH it was two o'clock before Thibault got home, he was up with the dawn. He was hatching a plot. He had not forgotten the promise he had made to the bailiff to send him some game from his warren; his warren being, in fact, the whole of the forest-land which belonged to his most serene Highness the Duke of Orleans. This was why he had got up in such good time. It had snowed for two hours before daybreak; and he now went and explored the forest in all directions, with the skill and cunning of a bloodhound.

He tracked the deer to its lair, the wild boar to its soil, the hare to its form; and followed their traces to discover where they went at night. And then, when darkness again fell on the forest, he gave a howl, a regular wolf's howl, in answer to which came crowding to him the wolves that he had invited the night before, followed by old and young recruits, even to the very cubs of a year old.

Thibault then explained that he expected a more than usually fine night's hunting from his friends, and as an encouragement to them, announced his intention of going with them himself and giving his help in the chase.

It was in very truth a hunt beyond the power of words to describe. The whole night through did the somber glades of the forest resound with hideous cries.

Here, a roebuck pursued by a wolf, fell, caught by the throat by another wolf hidden in ambush; there, Thibault, knife in hand like a butcher, was running to the assistance of three or four of his ferocious companions, that had already fastened on a fine young boar of four years old, which he now finished off.

An old she-wolf came along bringing with her half-a-dozen hares which she had surprized in their love frolics, and she had great difficulty in preventing her cubs from swallowing a whole covey of young partridges which the young marauders had come across with their heads under their wings, without first waiting for the wolf-master to levy his dues.

In a couple of hours' time the wolves had heaped up a perfect cart-load of game in front of Thibault's hut.

Thibault selected what he wanted for his own purposes, and left over sufficient to provide them a sumptuous repast. Borrowing a mule from a charcoal-burner, on the pretext that he wanted to convey his shoes to town, he loaded it up with the game and started for Villers-Cotterets. There he sold a part of this booty to the game-dealer, reserving the best pieces and those which had been least mutilated by the wolves' claws, to present to Madame Magloire.

His first intention had been to go in person with his gift to the bailiff; but Thibault was beginning to have a smattering of the ways of the world, and thought it would, therefore, be more becoming to allow his offering of game to precede him. To this end he employed a peasant on payment of a few coppers, to carry the game to the bailiff of Erneville,

merely accompanying it with a slip of paper, on which he wrote: "From Monsieur Thibault." He, himself, was to follow closely on the message; and, indeed, so closely did he do so, that he arrived just as Maître Magloire was having the game he had received spread out on a table.

The bailiff, in the warmth of his gratitude, extended his arms toward his friend of the previous night, and tried to embrace him, uttering loud cries of joy. I say *tried,* for two things prevented him from carrying out his wish; one, the shortness of his arms, the other, the rotundity of his person.

But thinking that where his capacities were insufficient, Madame Magloire might be of assistance, he ran to the door, calling at the top of his voice: "Suzanne, Suzanne!"

There was so unusual a tone in the bailiff's voice that his wife felt sure something extraordinary had happened, but whether for good or ill she was unable to make sure; and downstairs she came, therefore, in great haste, to see for herself what was taking place.

Madame Magloire gave Thibault her hand, allowed him to kiss her, and cast her beautiful eyes over the supply of food which elicited such exclamations of admiration from the bailiff. And as a supply, which was to make such an acceptable addition to the ordinary daily fare, it was certainly worthy of all admiration.

It was not long before the dinner-hour sounded, and Madame Suzanne came downstairs again. She was perfectly dazzling in a splendid dress of gray damask trimmed with pearl, and the transports of amorous admiration into which Thibault was thrown by the sight of her prevented the shoemaker from thinking of the awkwardness of the position in which he now unavoidably found himself, dining as he was for the first time with such handsome and distinguished company. To his credit, be it said, he did not make bad use of his opportunities. Not only did he cast frequent and unmistakable sheep's-eyes at his fair hostess, but he gradually brought his knee nearer to hers, and finally went so far as to give it a gentle pressure. Suddenly, and while Thibault was engaged in this performance, Madame Suzanne, who was looking sweetly toward him, opened her eyes and stared fixedly a moment. Then she opened her mouth and went off into such a violent fit of laughter that she almost choked, and nearly went into hysterics. Maître Magloire, taking no notice of the effect, turned straight to the cause, and he now looked at Thibault, and was much more concerned and alarmed with what he thought to see than with the nervous state of excitement into which his wife had been thrown by her hilarity.

"Ah! my dear fellow!" he cried, stretching two little agitated arms towards Thibault, "you are in flames, you are in flames!"

Thibault sprang up hastily.

"Where? How?" he asked.

"Your hair is on fire," answered the bailiff, in all sincerity; and so genuine was his terror that he seized the water bottle that was in front of his wife in order to put out the conflagration blazing among Thibault's locks.

The shoemaker involuntarily put up his hand to his head, but feeling no heat, he at once guessed what was the matter, and fell back into his chair, turning horribly pale. He had been so preoccupied during the last two days, that he had quite forgotten to take the same precaution he had done before visiting the owner of the mill, and had omitted to give his hair that particular twist whereby he was able to hide the hairs of which the black wolf had acquired the proprietorship under his

others. Added to this, he had during this short period given vent to so many little wishes, one here, and one there, all more or less to the detriment of his neighbor, that the flame-colored hairs had multiplied to an alarming extent, and at this moment any one of them could vie in brilliancy with the light from the two wax candles which lit the room.

"Well, you did give me a dreadful fright, Monsieur Magloire," said Thibault, trying to conceal his agitation.

"But, but——" responded the bailiff, still pointing with a certain remains of fear at Thibault's flaming lock of hair.

"That is nothing," continued Thibault, "do not be uneasy about the unusual color of some of my hair; it came from a fright my mother had with a pan of hot coals, that nearly set her hair on fire before I was born."

"But what is more strange still," said Madame Suzanne, who had swallowed a whole glassful of water in the effort to control her laughter, "I have remarked this dazzling peculiarity for the first time today."

"Ah! really!" said Thibault, scarcely knowing what to say in answer.

"The other day," continued Madame Suzanne, "it seemed to me that your hair was as black as my velvet mantle, and yet, believe me, I did not fail to study you most attentively, Monsieur Thibault."

"Ah! Madame," he replied, "you know the proverb: 'Red hair, warm heart,' and the other: 'Some folks are like ill-made sabots — smooth outside, but rough to wear'?"

And after this there was no further talk of Thibault's fiery head. Nevertheless, it seemed as if Madame Suzanne's eyes were irresistibly attracted to this unfortunate lock, and every time that Thibault's eyes met the mocking look in hers, he thought he detected on her face a reminiscence of the laugh which had not long since made him feel so uncomfortable. He was very much annoyed at this, and, in spite of himself, he kept putting up his hand to try and hide the unfortunate lock under the rest of his hair. But the hairs were not only unusual in color, but also of a phenomenal stiffness—it was no longer human hair, but horse-hair. In vain Thibault endeavored to hide the devil's hairs beneath his own; nothing, not even the hair-dresser's tongs could have induced them to lie otherwise than in the way which seemed natural to them. But although so occupied with thinking of his hair, Thibault's legs still continued their tender maneuvers; and although Madame Magloire made no response to their solicitations, she apparently had no wish to escape from them, and Thibault was presumptuously led to believe that he had achieved a conquest.

They sat on pretty late into the night, and Madame Suzanne, who appeared to find the evening drag, rose several times from the table and went backward and forward to other parts of the house, which afforded the bailiff opportunities of frequent visits to the cellar.

He hid so many bottles in the lining of his waistcoat, and once on the table, he emptied them so rapidly, that little by little his head sank lower and lower on to his chest, and it was evidently high time to put an end to the bout, if he was to be saved from falling under the table.

Thibault decided to profit by this condition of things, and to declare his love to the bailiff's wife without delay, judging it a good opportunity to speak while the husband was heavy with drink; he therefore expressed a wish to retire for the night. Whereupon they rose from table, and Perrine was called and bidden to show the guest to his room. As he followed her along the corridor, he made

inquiries of her concerning the different rooms.

Number one was Maître Magloire's, number two that of his wife, and number three was his. The bailiff's room, and his wife's communicated with one another by an inner door; Thibault's room had access to the corridor only.

He also noticed that Madame Suzanne was in her husband's room; no doubt some pious sense of conjugal duty had taken her there. The good man was in a condition approaching to that of Noah when his sons took occasion to insult him, and Madame Suzanne's assistance would seem to have been needed to get him into his room.

THIBAULT left his own room on tiptoe, carefully shut his door behind him, listened for a moment at the door of Madame Suzanne's room, heard no sound within, felt for the key, found it in the lock, paused a second, and then turned it.

The door opened; the room was in total darkness. But having for so long consorted with wolves, Thibault had acquired some of their characteristics, and, among others, that of being able to see in the dark.

He cast a rapid glance round the room; to the right was the fireplace; facing it a couch with a large mirror above it; behind him, on the side of the fireplace, a large bed, hung with figured silk; in front of him, near the couch, a dressing-table covered with a profusion of lace, and, last of all, two large draped windows. He hid himself behind the curtains of one of these, instinctively choosing the window that was farthest removed from the husband's room. After waiting a quarter of an hour, during which time Thibault's heart beat so violently that the sound of it, fatal omen! reminded him of the clicklack of the mill-wheel at Croyolles, Madame Suzanne entered the room.

Thibault's original plan had been to leave his hiding-place as soon as Madame Suzanne came in and the door was safely shut behind her, and there and then to make avowal of his love. But on consideration, fearing that in her surprize, and before she recognized who it was, she might not be able to suppress a cry which would betray them, he decided that it would be better to wait until Monsieur Magloire was asleep beyond all power of being awakened.

Perhaps, also, this procrastination may have been partly due to that feeling which all men have, however resolute of purpose they may be, of wishing to put off the critical moment, when on this moment depend such chances as hung on the one which was to decide for or against the happiness of the shoemaker. For Thibault, by dint of telling himself that he was madly in love with Madame Magloire, had ended by believing that he really was so, and, in spite of being under the protection of the black wolf, he experienced all the timidity of the genuine lover. So he kept himself concealed behind the curtains.

The bailiff's wife, however, had taken up her position before the mirror of her Pompadour table, and was decking herself out as if she were going to a festival or preparing to make one of a procession.

She tried on ten veils before making choice of one. She arranged the folds of her dress. She fastened a triple row of pearls round her neck. Then she loaded her arms with all the bracelets she possessed. Finally she dressed her hair with the minutest care.

Thibault was lost in conjectures as to the meaning of all this coquetry, when all of a sudden a dry, grating noise, as of some hard body coming in contact with a

(Please turn to page 573)

COMING NEXT MONTH

NOW a red wave of combat swept the hall, a storm of strife that shattered tables, smashed the benches, tore the hangings and trophies from the walls, and stained the floors with a red lake. Dazed by surprize and the ale they had drunken, with no time to arm themselves fully, the Norsemen yet fought back with all the reckless ferocity of their race. But the primitive fury of their attackers matched their own valor, and at the head of the hall, where a white-faced priest shielded a dying girl, Black Turlogh tore and ripped with a frenzy that made valor and fury alike futile.

And over all towered the Dark Man. To Turlogh's shifting glances, caught between the flash of sword and ax, it seemed that the image had grown—expanded—heightened; that it loomed giant-like over the battle; that its head rose into the smoke-filled rafters of the great hall; that it brooded like a dark cloud of death over these insects that cut each other's throats at its feet. Turlogh sensed in the lightning sword-play and the slaughter that this was the proper element of the Dark Man. Violence and fury were exuded by him. The raw smell of fresh-spilled blood was good to his nostrils and these yellow-haired corpses that rattled at his feet were as sacrifices to him.

The storm of battle rocked the mighty hall. The *skalli* became a shambles where men slipped in pools of blood, and slipping, died. No quarter was asked or given. And about the table where stood the Dark Man, immovable as a mountain, washed the red waves of slaughter. Norseman and tribesman died at his feet. . . .

This red-blooded story of the old, heroic days when the Norsemen were raiding the coasts of Ireland, killing the men and carrying off the women, will be printed complete in our next issue.

The Dark Man

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

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These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the next issue. Also, another thrilling installment of Alexandre Dumas' exciting tale, *The Wolf-Leader*, and the smashing conclusion of Otis Adelbert Kline's fascinating serial, *Tam, Son of the Tiger*.

December WEIRD TALES Out November 1

(Continued from page 436)

There is a hint on the same subject from Carlyle J. Bessette, of Charlotte, Vermont. "Just finished the September issue," he writes, "and *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* is, in my opinion, the best serial story you have published. I enjoy the weird stories very much but the scientific type are my favorites and I would like to see more of them. Clark Ashton Smith is your best author. His *The Immeasurable Horror* was certainly a masterpiece. Give us more of him and more of Kline, too."

Acknowledging payment for her story, *The Undead,* Amelia Reynolds Long writes: "I wish to express my appreciation of WEIRD TALES' new type of cover. The old ones that overlapped the edges of the magazine were not very durable, and after my copies of WEIRD TALES had made the rounds of the dormitories at school, they generally looked pretty ragged. The new ones stand much more handling. I wish to vote for *The Whisperer in Darkness* as the best story in the August number, and *Moon Madness* a fairly close second."

The feminine voice persists in a note from Duane Rimel, of Asotin, Washington. "It was with great satisfaction that I read your August number and I believe you have the ideal magazine. The stories are 'different.' This was my first experience at reading WEIRD TALES, but most assuredly I shall continue. When I brought the magazine home, one of my sisters got a peek inside and would not desist reading till she had finished about three stories. My other sister likewise besieged it till I had difficulty in keeping it long enough to read even one of the short stories."

Laurence Vibbert, of Waterville, Connecticut, writes: "In my estimation, the September issue of WEIRD TALES was by far the best you have published in a long time. It seemed good to greet Jules de Grandin and Solomon Kane once again. *Satan's Stepson* is one of Quinn's best. *The Footfalls Within* offers much food for thought, too. Congratulations, Mr. Howard! *Deadlock* (by Everil Worrell) was one of the best weird-scientific stories I ever read. Originality must be that author's middle name. *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* is the fastest-moving serial you have ever given us, with *The Wolf-Leader* a close second. Clark Ashton Smith *(The Immeasurable Horror)* was good, as usual. Smith writes in such a convincing manner that I can hardly believe his stories to be fiction. Long live WEIRD TALES!"

"WEIRD TALES is getting better with every issue," writes Michael Fogaris, of Passaic, New Jersey. "The current story, *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* is the best serial you have published in a long time. The cover illustrations for this story are superb. In the September issue my vote goes to this story. *Satan's Stepson* is a close second. *The Footfalls Within* also was excellent. *The Wolf-Leader* is an unusual story, and I think that you should be congratulated for publishing such a tale, which otherwise would have been unavailable to the majority of the readers."

H. F. Scotten, of Indianapolis, writes: "When a boy, I read everything I could find on mediæval fighting. I always thrilled to the hosts of marching warriors in flashing armor and brightly plumed helmets, and wielding heavy gleaming swords as they tramped through my imagination. I have witnessed, in spirit, every bloody struggle of the Norsemen, the Romans, the Gauls, the Celts, the Picts; but never did I read a more thrilling account of a battle than that portrayed in Robert E. Howard's

(Please turn to page 571)

(Continued from page 570)

Kings of the Night in last November's issue. Howard's whole series of stories concerning Kull, King of Valusia, is good, but *Kings of the Night* was a masterpiece unsurpassed by anything ever written on a like subject. Congratulate him for me."

"Again *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* takes first place," writes Jack Darrow of Chicago. "The third installment, although the shortest of the three, is the best so far. *Tam* is one of the most interesting characters Mr. Kline has yet written about. The cover for the third installment is a masterpiece. I think that it is the best cover you have yet had. *Satan's Stepson,* by Seabury Quinn, is my choice for second place. It is one of the most interesting Jules de Grandin stories. I read it at one sitting. For weirdness, *The Immeasurable Horror,* by Clark Ashton Smith, takes the cake. It certainly is bizarre and unusual. *Deadlock,* by Everil Worrell, is a peach of a story, as is *The Footfalls Within,* by Robert E. Howard. The rest of the stories in order of merit are: *The Wolf-Leader,* by Dumas, *The Golden Elixir,* by Ernst, *The Message,* by Dangerfield, *His Brother's Keeper,* by Eliot, and *The Bridge of Sighs,*

(Please turn to page 572)

(Continued from page 571)

by Derleth. The black-and-white drawings by Senf were excellent. I am impatiently waiting the next issue of our magazine."

A young reader who prefers to remain anonymous writes: "I am only fifteen and love to read. In fact I am wearing glasses from reading WEIRD TALES. Among the stories this month, the best ones were *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* by Otis Adelbert Kline, *Creeping Fingers,* by Loretta G. Burrough, and *The Undead,* by Amelia Reynolds Long. If the story, *The Undead,* were longer, I'd go blind, and please let *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* be long."

"It was sure a lucky day for me when I happened to buy a copy of WEIRD TALES at the news stand," writes J. C. Richards of Scott, Saskatchewan, Canada, "and although I have read but two issues I think that it is one of the best magazines that I get. Otis Adelbert Kline's story, *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* is certainly great so far. He sure is a brilliant author and you should print his picture and biography in the magazine. I sure would like to see what he looks like and find out something about him. Would you also send me a back issue list of WEIRD TALES and a list of some old Oriental Stories? I would like to get some. Yours for a bigger and better WEIRD TALES."

Readers, which are your favorite stories in this issue?

My Favorite Stories in the November Weird Tales Are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
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The Wolf-Leader

(Continued from page 568)

pane of glass, made him start. Madame Suzanne started too, and immediately put out the lights. The shoemaker then heard her step softly to the window, and cautiously open it; whereupon there followed some whisperings, of which Thibault could not catch the words, but, by drawing the curtain a little aside, he was able to distinguish in the darkness the figure of a man of gigantic stature, who appeared to be climbing through the window.

Thibault instantly recalled his adventure with the unknown combatant, whose mantle he had clung to, and whom he had so triumphantly disposed of by hitting him on the forehead with a stone. As far as he could make out, this would be the same window from which the giant had descended when he made use of Thibault's two shoulders as a ladder. The surmise of identity was, undoubtedly, founded on a logical conclusion. As a man was now climbing in at the window, a man could very well have been climbing down from it; and if a man did climb down from it—unless, of course, Madame Magloire's acquaintances were many in number, and she had a great variety of tastes—if a man did climb down from it, in all probability, it was the same man who at this moment was climbing in.

But whoever this nocturnal visitor might be, Madame Suzanne held out her hand to the intruder, who took a heavy jump into the room, which made the floor tremble and set all the furniture shaking.

"Oh! take care, my lord," Madame Suzanne's voice was heard to say, "heavily as my husband sleeps, if you make such a noise as that, you will wake him up."

"By the devil and his horns! my fair friend," replied the stranger. "I can not

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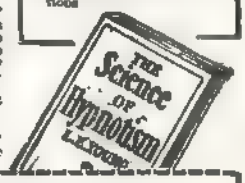

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alight like a bird!" and Thibault recognized the voice as that of the man with whom he had had the altercation a night or two before. "Although while I was waiting under your window for the happy moment, my heart was so sick with longing that I felt as if wings must grow ere long, to bear me up into this dear wished-for little room."

"And I too, my lord," replied Madame Magloire with a simper, "I too was troubled to leave you outside to freeze in the cold wind, but the guest who was with us this evening only left us half an hour ago."

"And what have you been doing, my dear one, during this last half-hour?"

"I was obliged to help Monsieur Magloire, my lord, and to make sure that he would not come and interrupt us."

"You were right, as you always are, my heart's love."

"My lord is too kind," replied Suzanne —or, more correctly, tried to reply, for her last words were interrupted as if by some foreign body being placed upon her lips, which prevented her from finishing the sentence; and at the same moment, Thibault heard a sound which was remarkably like that of a kiss. The wretched man was beginning to understand the extent of the disappointment of which he was again the victim. His reflections were interrupted by the voice of the newcomer, who coughed two or three times.

"Suppose we shut the window, my love," said the voice, after this preliminary coughing.

"Oh! my lord, forgive me," said Madame Magloire, "it ought to have been closed before," And so saying she went to the window, which she first shut close, and then closed even more hermetically by drawing the curtains across it. The stranger meanwhile, who made himself thoroughly at home, had drawn an easy chair up to the fire, and sat with his legs stretched out, warming his feet in the most luxourius fashion. Reflecting, no doubt, that for a man half frozen, the most immediate necessity is to thaw himself, Madame Suzanne seemed to find no cause of offense in this behavior on the part of her aristocratic lover, but came up to his chair and leant her pretty arms over the back in the most fascinating posture. Thibault had a good view of the group from behind, well thrown up by the light of the fire, and he was overcome with inward rage. The stranger appeared for a while to have no thought beyond that of warming himself; but at last, the fire having performed its appointed task, he asked:

"And this stranger, this guest of yours, who is he?"

"Ah! my lord!" answered Madame Magloire, "you already know him only too well."

"What!" said the favored lover, "do you mean to say it was that drunken lout of the other night, again?"

"The very same, my lord."

"Well, all I can say is, if ever I get him into my grip again——"

"My lord," responded Suzanne, in a voice as soft as music, "you must not harbor evil designs against your enemies; on the contrary, you must forgive them as we are taught to do by our holy religion."

"There is also another religion which teaches that, my dearest love, one of which you are the all-supreme goddess, and I but a humble neophyte. . . . And I am wrong in wishing evil to the scoundrel, for it was owing to the treacherous and cowardly way in which he attacked and did for me, that I had the opportunity I had so long wished for, of being introduced into this house. The lucky blow

on my forehead with his stone made me faint; and because you saw I had fainted, you called your husband; it was on account of your husband finding me without consciousness beneath your window, and believing I had been set upon by thieves, that he had me carried indoors; and lastly, because you were so moved by pity at the thought of what I had suffered for you, that you were willing to let me in here. And so, this good-for-nothing fellow, this contemptible scamp, is after all the scource of all good, for all the good of life for me is in your love; nevertheless if ever he comes within reach of my whip, he will not have a very pleasant time of it."

"It seems then," muttered Thibault, swearing to himself, "that my wish has again turned to the advantage of some one else! Ah! my friend, black wolf, I have still something to learn, but, confound it all! I will in future think so well over my wishes before expressing them that the pupil will become master . . . but to whom does that voice, that I seem to know, belong?" Thibault continued, trying to recall it, "for the voice is familiar to me, of that I am certain!"

"You would be even more incensed against him, poor wretch, if I were to tell you something."

"And what is that, my love?"

"Well, that good-for-nothing fellow, as you call him, is making love to me."

"Phew!"

"That is so, my lord," said Madame Suzanne, laughing.

"What! that boor, that low rascal! Where is he? Where does he hide himself? By Beelzebub! I'll throw him to my dogs to eat!"

And then, all at once, Thibault recog-

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nized his man. "Ah! my Lord Baron," he muttered, "it's you, is it?"

"Pray do not trouble yourself about it, my lord," said Madame Suzanne, laying her two hands on her lover's shoulders, and obliging him to sit down again, "your lordship is the only person whom I love, and even were it not so, a man with a lock of red hair right in the middle of his forehead is not the one to whom I should give away my heart." And as the recollection of this lock of hair, which had made her laugh so at dinner, came back to her, she again gave way to her amusement.

A violent feeling of anger toward the bailiff's wife took possession of Thibault.

"Ah! traitress!" he exclaimed to himself, "what would I not give for your husband, your good, upright husband, to walk in at this moment and surprize you.

Scarcely was the wish uttered, when the door of communication between Suzanne's room and that of Monsieur Magloire was thrown wide open, and in walked her husband with an enormous night-cap on his head, which made him look nearly five feet high, and holding a lighted candle in his hand.

"Ah! ah!" muttered Thibault. "Well done! It's my turn to laugh now, Madame Magloire."

(To be continued next month.)

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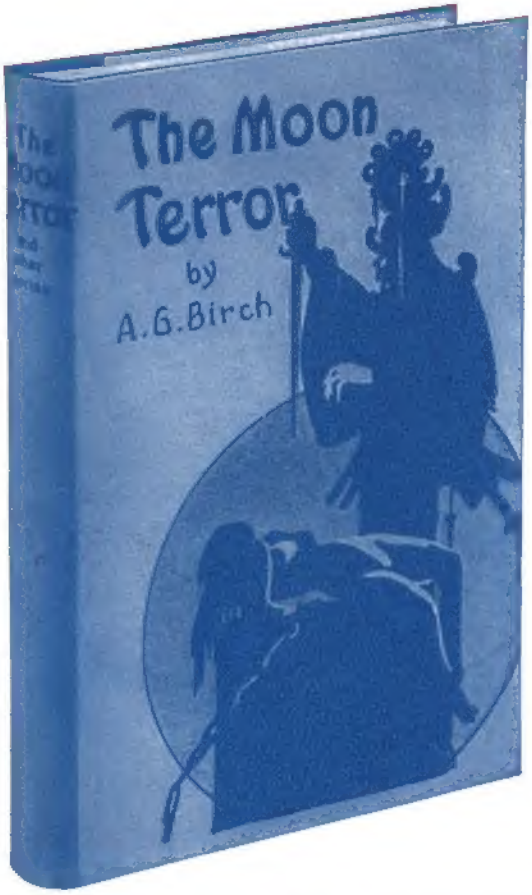

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